

CAN **EDGE** EVER BE A MAIN-EVENTER?

THE WRESTLER PRESENTS

# INSIDE Wrestling



## HULK'S MIRACLE COMEBACK

WILL THE FANS LET HIM MAKE THE SMART CHOICE?

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# names makin' news

By Harry Burkett

**“FLYBOY” ROCCO ROCK**, best known as a member of **Public Enemy** with partner **Johnny Grunge**, died of an apparent heart attack at age 49 while traveling to an independent wrestling show in Philadelphia on September 21. Rock, who earlier in the day had wrestled **Devon Storm (Crowbar)** at a show for JCW in Jersey City, New Jersey, was to have wrestled Gary Wolfe on a 3PW card.

Rock, whose real name was **Ted Petty**, began his career way back in 1978 and wrestled under various names, including **The Cheetah Kid**, before achieving his greatest fame in ECW as part of Public Enemy. While there, he and Johnny Grunge captured the tag team title on four occasions in 1994 and '95. PE quickly gained a cult following and epitomized the renegade spirit of ECW in its early years. Public Enemy did for hardcore/extreme

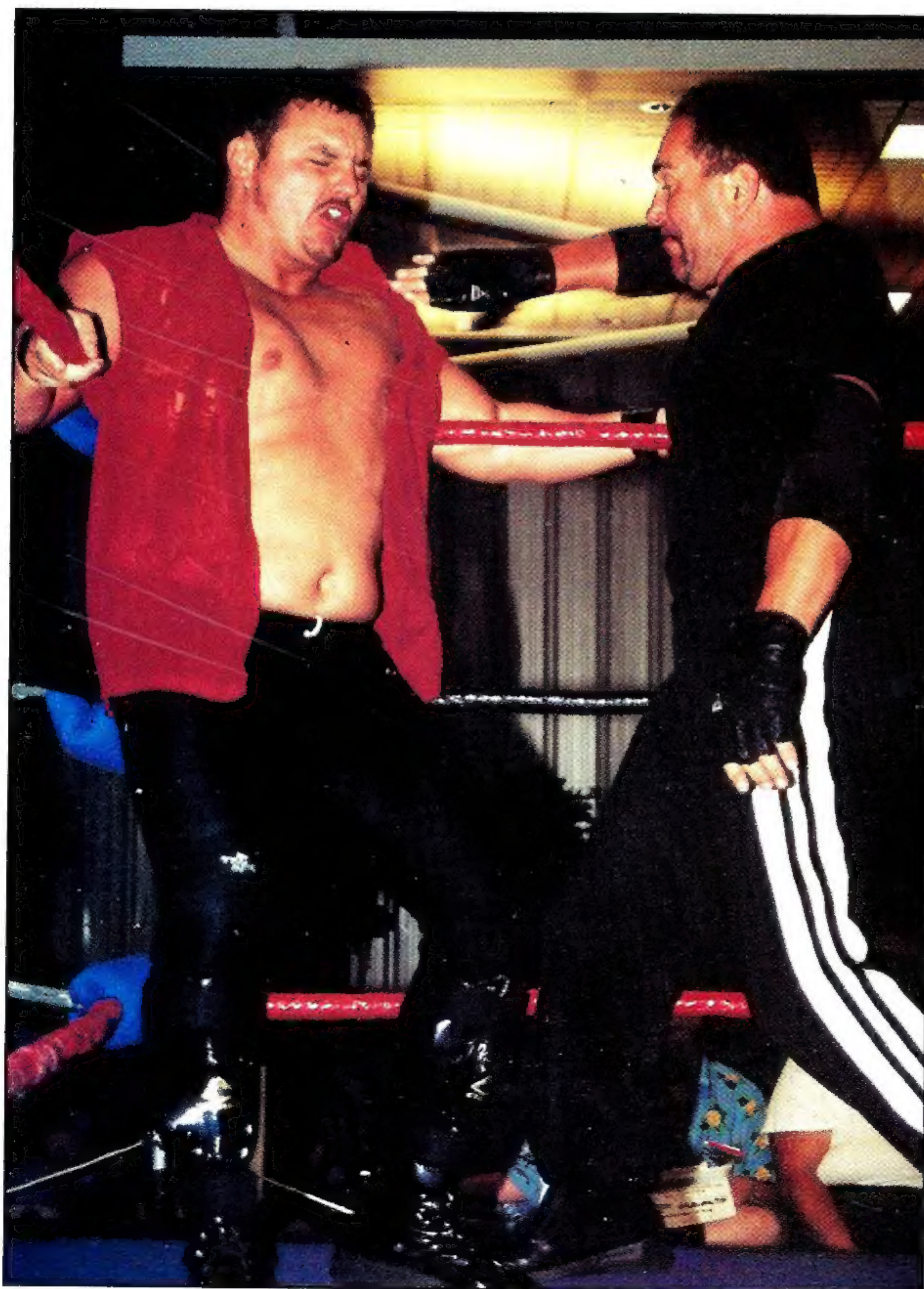
wrestling what The Road Warriors did for the brawling/smashmouth style. Wrestling fans voted them second runner-up for *PWI* Tag Team of the Year in 1994.

But chants of “You sold out!” followed Rock and Grunge to WCW, where they defeated **Harlem Heat** for the World tag team title on September 23, 1996. They held the belts for only one week before dropping them back to **Stevie Ray** and **Booker T**. Rock and Grunge, one of the first duos to successfully blend tag team competition with the hardcore style, were also the first WCW team to send a man—**Buff Bagwell** on *Monday Nitro*—through two double-decked tables and onto the concrete floor.

Rock and Grunge had a failed stint in the WWF before attempting another return to ECW. The Philly crowd didn't forgive Public Enemy for what they perceived to be a betrayal, and Rock and Grunge went back to their indy roots.

In recent years, Rock had been appearing as a singles wrestler on the indy circuit. He was a legitimate tough guy, serving as a sparring partner for a number of famous heavy-weight boxers.

The world title split has finally occurred in WWE, after most observers believed the concept of an undisputed champion was a success. Potentially, this could be a very confusing situation, as **Brock Lesnar**, who became an exclusive *Smackdown* property shortly after he defeated



Rocco Rock vs. The Rock for the title at Summer-





Trish "Stratus-fied" her fans

Slam, is now referred to as the "WWE champion." In response, **Eric Bischoff** crowned **Triple-H** the "World heavyweight champion" for *Raw*.

According to the WWE mindset (apparently), Lesnar is the WWE champion, and Triple-H is the World champion. The company is viewing both as world champions of equal standing. Here at INSIDE WRESTLING, we're going

to keep it simple and recognize one as the *Smackdown* champion and the other as the *Raw* champion.

Brock Lesnar's main-event winning streak ended as he wrestled **The Undertaker** to a double-disqualification at Unforgiven. That was a surprising outcome since Lesnar had already cleanly defeated **Hulk Hogan** and The Rock. "The Dead Man" must still have some life left in him.

And what of Bischoff's champion? Triple-H's title defense against **Rob Van Dam** was scheduled for mid-way through the card. Van Dam was on the verge of beating Triple-H for the *Raw* title when **Ric Flair** ran into the ring. Flair, who had received verbal abuse from Triple-H in recent weeks, surprised everyone by striking Van Dam with Helmsley's sledgehammer. Earlier on the pay-per-view, Flair had submitted to Intercontinental champion **Chris Jericho's** Walls of Jericho in surprisingly quick fashion. No wonder. The "Nature Boy" obviously had a backup plan to steal the show.

**Trish Stratus** firmly established herself as WWE's top female star with her victory over **Molly Holly** for the women's title. Perhaps *Smackdown* viewers will get to experience some "Stratus-faction" again. Thanks to Molly Holly, they had remained abstinent.

Also at Unforgiven, **Chris Benoit** beat **Kurt Angle** ... **Jamal** and **Rosie** beat **Billy Gunn** and **Chuck Palumbo** ... **Eddie Guerrero** pinned **Edge** ... **Buh Buh Ray Dudley**, Booker T, **Goldust**, and **Kane** defeated **The Un-Americans** **Rey Misterio Jr.** defeated **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** in a match shown on *Heat*.

In other WWE news, **Bradshaw** suffered a torn biceps during his tag team effort with Kane against Un-Americans **Lance Storm** and **Christian** on the September 9 edition of *Raw*. Bradshaw attempted to clothesline Christian over the top rope with his left arm, which was literally an odd twist on his famous move. Bradshaw uses his right arm for his clothesline from hell.

Bradshaw not only finished the match, but he also ran to the ring with Kane to rescue Booker T and Goldust from **William Regal** and **Test** later in the program. Birmingham, Alabama-based **Dr. James Andrews**, who performed surgery on the large tear the following day, said it would take four to six months—and extensive rehabilitation—for Bradshaw to make his in-ring return. Don't bet against Bradshaw, folks. He has proven to be Texas tough.

It would be inaccurate to say that *Raw* has a new look, but commentator **Jerry Lawler** definitely has a new look. "The King" underwent cosmetic surgery in his hometown in Memphis. Surgeons tightened up the skin under his chin and around his eyes, which resulted in swelling and black eyes when he appeared on *Raw* only days later. Cameras avoided closeups of Lawler that night, and he even used a pair of binoculars to shield his eyes from view.

I won't accuse "The King" of vanity, because these cosmetic touchups are considered necessary in today's image-conscious world. It also makes it easier to pick up chicks.

One beautiful woman who is headed for great things appears to be *Raw* ring announcer **Lillian Garcia**. She has signed a deal with Universal Records for her first



major album of original songs. It is scheduled for release in early-2003. Her debut single, "Shout," was scheduled to be released to pop radio stations on October 8, 2002.

Garcia began her singing career in Mexico as a teenager before forming a band in the United States during her early-20s. WWE officials spotted Garcia singing "The Star-Spangled Banner" prior to an NBA game and later offered her a contract. Her stirring rendition of "God Bless America" on *Smackdown* following the September 11 terrorist attacks will be remembered as one of wrestling's finest moments.

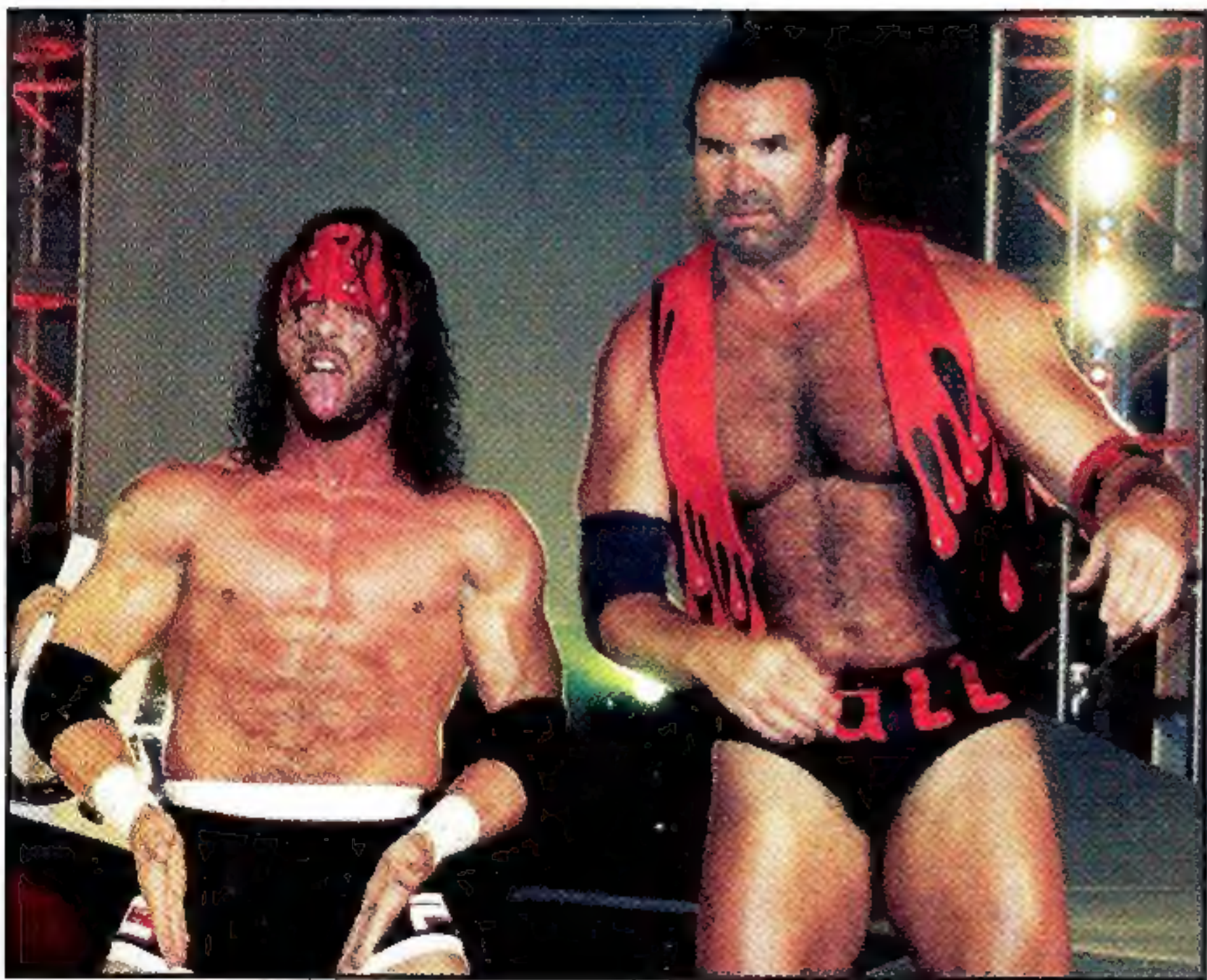
**Sean Waltman**, who agreed to a mutual parting of the ways with WWE a few months ago, has signed a contract with NWA-TNA. Waltman had disagreed with the WWE creative team concerning the direction of his **X-Pac** character, and the demise of the **NWO** seemed to seal his fate. He reached an agreement with TNA co-owner **Jerry Jarrett** on September 12. WWE is allowing Waltman to wrestle under the name **Syxx-Pac**.

Finally, we should get to see the long-awaited rematch between Waltman and **Jerry Lynn**, who lit up the GWF's light heavyweight division in the early-1990s. I'm sure they can help **A.J. Styles** and **Low-Ki** continue to do the same for TNA's X division.

More fans will be able to see that sensational X action in the near future. *NWA Saturday Morning*, which was originally designed to lure Tennessee fans to the site of TNA pay-per-views, should soon be available to between 30 and 50 additional markets via syndication. If this deal is successful, TNA's PPV buy rates should climb.

Congratulations to "**Spiffy**" **Sean Stylez**, who finally achieved his goal of capturing the NWA East brass knuckles title from "**Soviet Shooter**" **Nikita Allanov** on August 17. He beat Allanov in a falls-count-anywhere brawl during NWA East's debut show in Tridelpia, West Virginia. The fight got so wild that Stylez actually put the American expatriate through a wall!

Allanov, born **Jefferson Allan**, had defeated Stylez in best-of-three series last summer, and this was considered Stylez' last shot. It is the first title of "Spiffy's"



Syxx-Pac and Hall in TNA

career. Stylez even retained the belt in a gauntlet match against former brass knucks champs at the NWA East's eighth anniversary show on September 14.

Also on the independent scene, Maryland Championship Wrestling recently hosted "Tag Wars 2K2" in Glen Burnie, Maryland. Long-time fans of **Joey Matthews** and **Christian**

## NEWS ANALYSIS

**FAREWELL TO "FLYBOY."** Less than a month before his death, Rocco Rock was scheduled to wrestle at an indy show in Chincoteague, Virginia. But Rock had taken the wrong highway and I watched the promoter as he prayed "Flyboy" would make it on time. He finally made it, jumping out of his car and into the ring against The Stro. He looked full of vigor to me. I would have never guessed he'd be dead within a month.

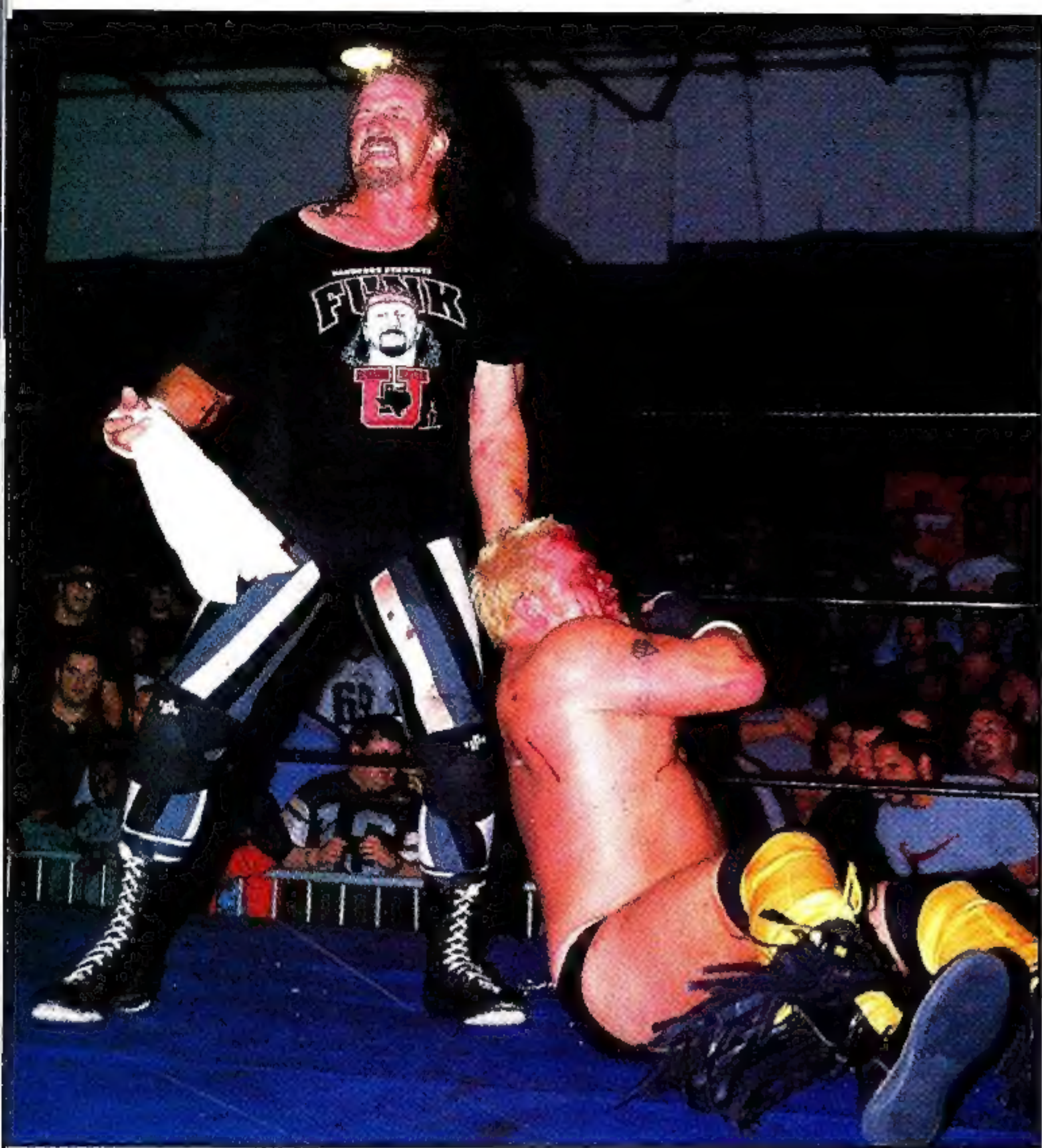
**TWO WWE WORLD TITLES.** Five months after the WWE brand extension, I didn't expect the undisputed championships to split into two titles, one recognized by *Raw* and another by *Smackdown*. The WWE office must do something to legitimize the *Raw* title, if only to stop Internet writers from referring to it as Triple-H's "big gold belt" to distinguish between the two. Putting together the title histories in *The Wrestling Almanac* will be a chore this year.

**COULD IT BE HER SWANSONG?** Lillian Garcia has bypassed Smackdown Records and gone straight for a major music label: Universal Records. I consider her one of the nicest and least pretentious WWE divas. Singing at WWE shows is fine, but it would be great to see her career take a mainstream turn. Maybe she can sing a love song for The Rock's next movie. Beat that, Howard Finkel.

**BRING BACK THE CROCKETT CUP.** I saw some great tag team action at MCW's "Tag Wars 2K2," but I lamented the fact that it wasn't a full-fledged tournament. The Russ Haas Memorial tag team tournament, promoted by Phoenix Championship Wrestling, brought back good memories of the Crockett Cup. They claim it will be an annual event—a tag team equivalent of the Super 8. Let's hope that's indeed the case.

**XPW'S HOSTILE TAKEOVER.** Where were the strippers? Where were the first-degree burns? Where were the cops? I attended XPW's debut show at Viking Hall in part because I was convinced there would be a horrible spectacle. It was like getting to the crime scene before the crime takes place. I was pleasantly surprised that XPW didn't rely on outrageous stunts to attract old ECW fans. On this night, wrestling was the thing, and it was quite good.





Funk and Douglas get Xtreme

**York** will be sad to learn that the two friends—both of whom had experience with WCW, the WWF, and ECW in the past—will no longer be teaming together in MCW. There was no bitter breakup, however. They just made the mistake of agreeing to that stipulation prior to their falls-count-anywhere match against perennial rivals **The Holy Rollers**. The four or five fans of **Rich Myers** and **Earl the Pearl** will be relieved that the Rollers are still intact.

**Chris Chetti** turned against **Danny Doring** during their main-event match against **Romeo Valentino** and MCW champ **The Bruiser**. Valentino and Bruiser, of course, won the match. Doesn't ECW loyalty count for anything?

In other MCW news, **Angela** lost in her debut against **Candie**, and former heavyweight champ **Orlando Jordan**—who has trained with **Rocky Johnson** and his somewhat famous son, The Rock—signed a developmental contract with WWE.

Xtreme Pro Wrestling made its long-anticipated East Coast debut with a "Hostile Takeover" of Viking Hall, otherwise known as the old ECW Arena. It was akin to **Vince McMahon** dancing on **Ted Turner's** grave, but it seemed as if XPW did its best to please ECW fans.

The main event, pitting XPW champion **Shane Douglas** against **Terry Funk**, ended prematurely when, somehow, a shard of glass from a beer bottle opened up a horrible gash on Funk's arm. It was one of the ugliest cuts I have ever seen. Despite the wound, Funk still kicked out from Douglas' piledriver. Although "The Franchise" eventually got the pinfall, he appeared to be furious after the match. Douglas, who has taken over booking for the company, didn't want to be embarrassed in his home arena.

Also at "Hostile Takeover," TV champion **Kaos** beat **Chris Hamrick** ... **Vic Grimes** beat **Little Guido Maritato** and **Altar Boy Luke** in a three-way match ... **Juventud Guerrera** defeated **Chris Chetti** ... King of the deathmatch **Supreme** beat **Angel** ... Tag team champions **Damien 666** and **Halloween** defeated **The Real Panthers** ... **The Sandman** and **Pogo the Clown** battled to a no-contest ... **Psicosis** beat **Super Crazy**.

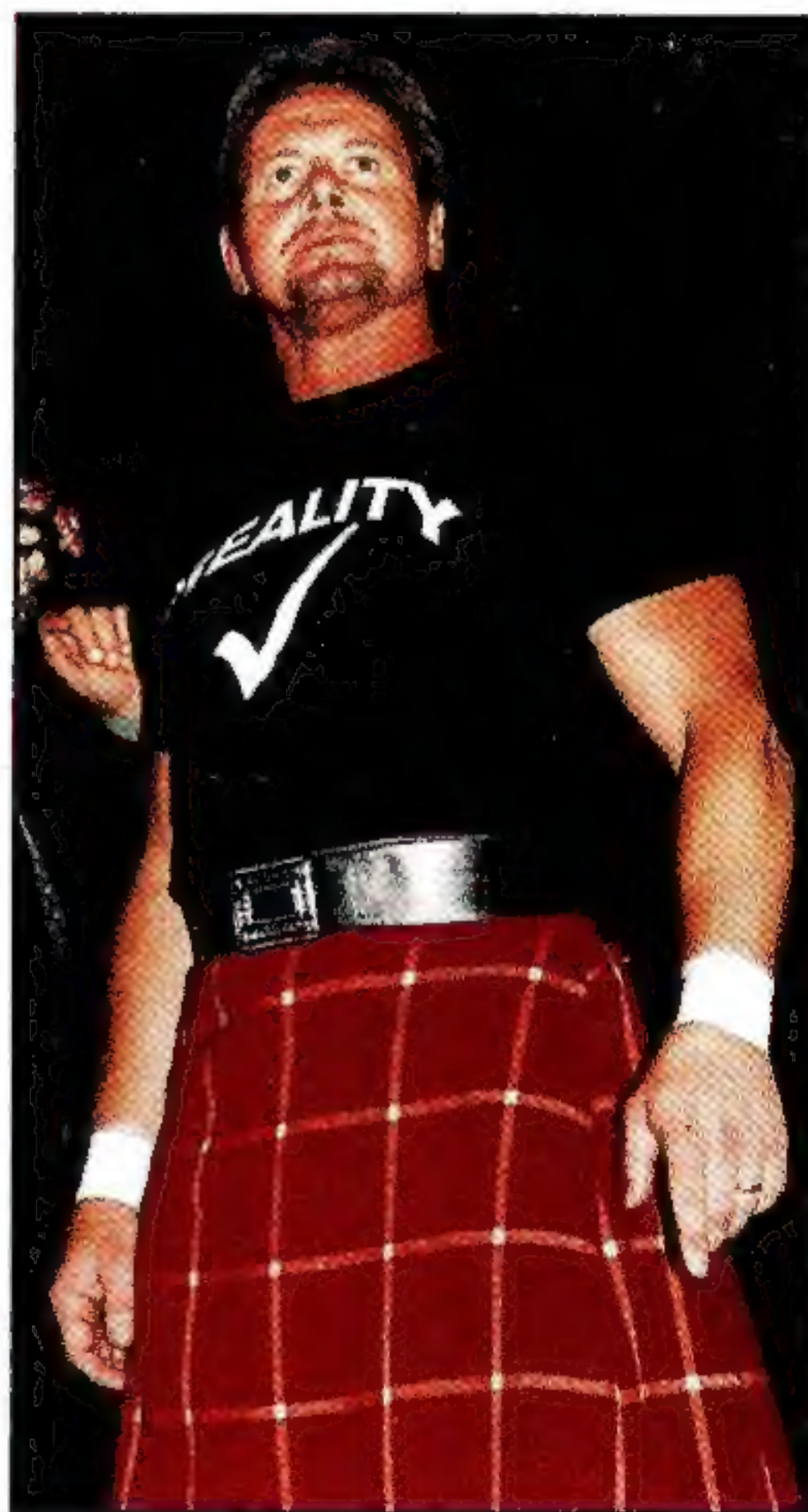
News from NWA Extreme Canadian Championship Wrestling: **Ladies Choice** grabbed a steel chair that **Moondog Manson** had placed in the ring, and used it to beat **Scotty Mac** for the Pacific Northwest title on September 13 in Surrey, British Columbia. **Dr. Luther** thrilled the fans at Bridgeview Hall by attacking Mac after the match ... Manson came one step closer to a hardcore title shot by defeating **Rico Quinones** ... **Matt Classic** made his debut with a win over **The Count**.

This 'n' that: There is still no word on when or whether **Hulk Hogan** will return to WWE. He hasn't wrestled for WWE since he begged out of competing at the "Global Warning" card in Melbourne, Australia, in August. His last match was his devastating loss to Brock Lesnar ... WWE posted a profit of only \$2.5-million for its first quarter, ending July 26. That was down from \$12-million the previous year, although that had been helped by one-time gains in licensee sales ... Chris Benoit beat "The Machine" **Doug Basham** in the main event of Ohio Valley's "Fall Brawl." For in-depth coverage, check out **Liz Hunter's** "On Assignment" column just a few pages after me.

From the Mouth That Roared Dept.: Writing tell-all wrestling autobiographies is the "in" thing these days, and it should come as no surprise that **Roddy Piper** has added his book to the growing library. In *The Pit With Piper* details everything from his close encounter with the recently deceased "Hillside Stranger" (of California serial murder fame) to his role in the WWF's national expansion. As a lifelong "Hot Rod" fan, I've been waiting for this account for a long time. It received a favorable review from **Will Welsh** in the January 2003 issue of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* and should be available at bookstores now.

See you at the matches!

(Harry Burkett can be reached via e-mail at [HBurkettJr@excite.com](mailto:HBurkettJr@excite.com).)



Piper's an author now



## data sheet

### **TOMMY DREAMER**

HEIGHT: 6'3"

WEIGHT: 265

HOMETOWN: Yonkers, NY

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE:

He was moved to tears on April 22, 2000, the night he *finally* became ECW World champ by beating Tazz at the ECW Arena. That his reign lasted maybe 15 minutes before Justin Credible beat him in an impromptu challenge doesn't diminish the memory for him  
HE DOES IT SO WELL: Wills himself to be the best he can be. Dreamer wasn't blessed with extraordinary skills or special charisma, but precious few in WWE are less selfish or work harder. He is appreciative of the opportunity he's been given, loves what he does, and always gives everything he has.

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE:

Considering all the brutal matches he had in ECW, there are probably a few body parts of his that could use replacing. Since that won't happen, the best thing for him to try to do is avoid taking so much punishment

PET FINISHER: Death Valley driver

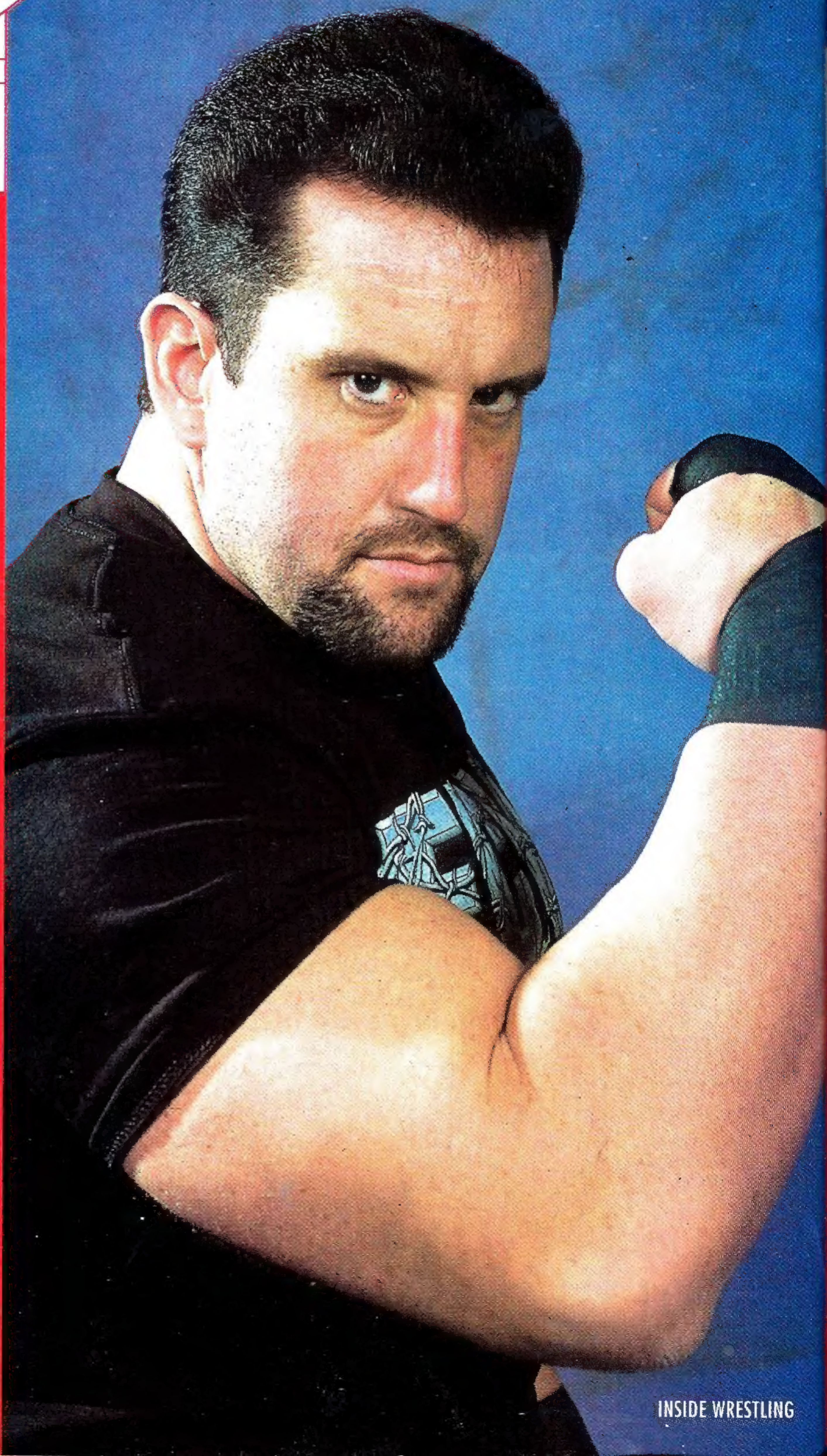
BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: It

looked for a long time like he'd be lucky to be a regular on *Heat* in WWE, but he showed the creative team he's worthy of a spot on *Raw*. And his all-guts, never-say-die attitude is catching on with fans

OUTLOOK FOR 2003: Dreamer's goal ought to be to become at least a semi-regular on WWE pay-per-views. As of press time, he hadn't competed on even one. If WWE continues to recognize two world titles, most of *Raw*'s major players will likely pursue the *Raw* title. That could give Dreamer an opening to make a run at the I-C gold. If he can do that, he'll be on PPV quite a bit

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "If every wrestler in this business had Tommy Dreamer's guts, desire, and pride, it'd be a much better business than it is already."

—Buh Buh Ray Dudley





## DOUG BASHAM

HEIGHT: 6'2"

WEIGHT: 241

HOMETOWN: Louisville, KY

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE:

The day he was handed his WWE contract—May 29, 2002—and was reassigned to Ohio Valley Wrestling, the very promotion from which he had just been fired!

HE DOES IT SO WELL: "The Machine" masterfully manipulates his opponents both mentally and physically

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE:

Luck. There's not much more for him to improve upon. He already has a great look, plenty of ability and experience, and an all-important WWE developmental contract. What more does he need?

PET FINISHER: For a man who is touted as the most technically proficient wrestler in OVW, he never uses an established finishing move. His matches almost always end with outside interference from Damaja, Victoria, or Jackie Gayda

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: Facing Chris Benoit in OVW in September. Getting a chance to go one-on-one with arguably the best technical wrestler in the world was a good skills test for him. Even though the match ended in a messy brawl and Benoit ultimately got the pin, Basham had no reason to be unhappy with his performance

OUTLOOK FOR 2003: This could be either his breakout year or his downfall. He is poised to make it in WWE (provided he gets a shot), but if he doesn't get called up this year, he might just peak without ever getting the chance to be seen on a WWE TV show

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS:

"Doug is deranged ... there's not much more that anyone can say. He's been a pain in our ass for years now, and I'd love to see him make it to WWE so he can be somebody else's pain."

—Jim Cornette





## on the road

With Dave Lenker

**G**O FIGURE. EXACTLY one year ago, in the February 2002 issue of *INSIDE WRESTLING* in this very column, I wrote about watching Scott Hall take on Keiji Muto for the All-Japan Triple Crown championship. Stu Saks sent me on that assignment to Japan so that I might appraise Hall's chances of making a comeback with WWE.



Photos By Koichi Yoshizawa

The Bill Goldberg that Dave Lenker saw in Japan looked a lot like the Goldberg we saw during his magnificent run in WCW four years ago. He's determined, he's focused, and he looks like he's ready to dominate the world. His immediate future involves Japan. But he could be WWE-bound soon enough.

Watching Hall in the ring, I thought he looked pretty good. "For nearly 15 minutes, he pushed one of the greatest wrestlers of all-time to the limit," I wrote at the time, "and he nearly took his title a couple of times."

As we all know, Hall eventually returned to WWE during the ill-fated New World Order angle. He lasted a few months and looked like the hardest-working wrestler of the

group, but personal demons again took their toll and he was let go. I wasn't surprised, but I was disappointed. Hall showed me a lot in that match with Muto, and no matter what anyone ever says about him, he is one of wrestling's most entertaining characters when he's clean, coherent, and motivated. And, yes, I'm still pulling for him.

But enough about last year's column. It's now on to the subject of this year's column: another trip to Japan.

That's right, after holing up in two-bit towns like Grand Forks, North Dakota, Mankato, Minnesota, and Cleveland, Ohio, over the past year, I was finally offered another trip to Japan. And once again I was there to scout a name that hadn't been heard from (in the ring) in quite a while: the indomitable Bill Goldberg.

The fact that I was there to appraise the former WCW World champion shouldn't shock anyone. Even though his run atop the sport was short, he was a legitimate superstar. At the height of his popularity, he was arguably wrestling's biggest household name. It wasn't until WCW started declining (and Goldberg started losing matches) that guys like "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin and The Rock became significantly more popular with the mainstream media. And considering that his name is brought up whenever anyone mentions available free agents on the market (and almost every week in Jim Ross' "Ross Report"), I just had to get a look at him.

It's not too often that you get to witness the rebirth of a legend.

And that's exactly what Goldberg could still be. He might have only been



on the top of our sport for a couple of years—and truly at the tip-top of the sport for about a year—but Goldberg left an indelible mark upon the world of professional wrestling. When he wrestled, he was the most intimidating man on the planet.

He wasn't given his "Da Man" nickname by happenstance. He was an unstoppable force.

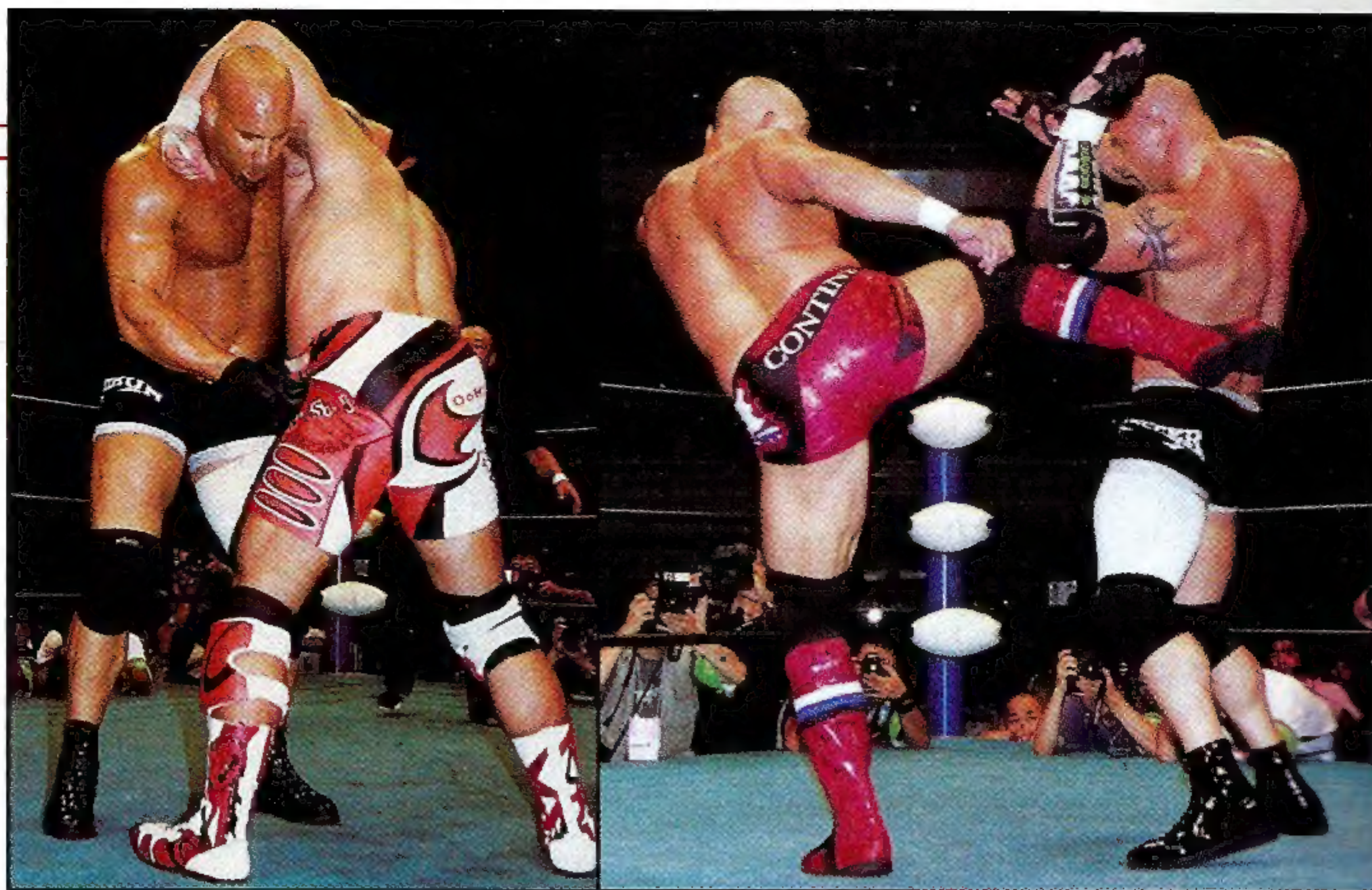
He still looks like one.

Prior to his return, the last time big Bill wrestled was January 14, 2001. Teaming with Sgt. DeWayne Bruce, Goldberg lost a retirement match to Buff Bagwell and Lex Luger. It was a ridiculous match, and at the time, no one expected that Goldberg would really retire. No one expected that his semi-retirement would last more than 19 months, though, either. I thought that he'd be back inside the ring within three or four months—that's the way wrestling "retirement" matches go nowadays, and it's one of the reasons that I was so interested in Goldberg's return. Would there be ring rust? Would that ever-present glimmer in his eyes still be present? Would he want it as much as he did while he was on top in WCW? And would he be "Da Man" that we all once knew?

Yes, yes, yes, and most definitely yes. Ring rust was present, but Goldberg's performance was also hampered by a sore left thigh that was taped up and an arm injury that hadn't completely healed. (Goldberg sustained the injury when he slammed his arm against his car during a celebrity auto race.) Given the fact that he had the last 19 months off, though, the ring rust wasn't anything unexpected. He looked as sharp as anyone could possibly expect him to be after such a long layoff. I was impressed with his conditioning and size (he looks like he'd win a game of chicken with a Mack Truck).

I received my answer to the "glimmer in the eyes" question when Goldberg made his way to the ring for the first time. Using his old WCW intro music, Goldberg walked out from the back and into an explosion of pyrotechnics that was set up to look exactly like his old WCW entrance. After the fireworks began to fade, up came his giant arms, sweeping into the air with destructive force.

Yes, sir, the intimidation factor was still in full effect. In fact, his presence was so commanding that it was hard to believe that he had actually taken that much time off. There



A lingering arm injury prevented Goldberg from using the jackhammer in either of his first two matches in Japan, but it didn't stop him from steamrolling Satoshi Kojima in his debut (above left). And he didn't let a few stiff kicks from Taiyo Kea stop him the next night (above right). How dominant will he look when he's 100 percent healthy again?

was no hesitation as he approached the ring. He looked fearless.

Then came the actual matches, and they left no doubt that Goldberg's return was absolutely and 100 percent for real. His first victim was Satoshi Kojima, one of All-Japan's brightest stars and ranked number 31 in the "PWI 500." Goldberg made quick work of the 6'1", 217-pounder, pinning him in less than five minutes. You have to wonder if All-Japan officials didn't put Kojima (who recently jumped to All-Japan after a decade with New Japan) in there with Goldberg first as a way to protect a long-time All-Japan wrestler from suffering a humbling defeat to a man who hadn't competed in such a long time.

Of course, it's not like that stopped Goldberg from running through All-Japan veteran Taiyo Kea (number 51 in the "PWI 500") one night later. Goldberg defeated Kea in less than four minutes, using a maneuver that I can best describe as a one-armed power bomb.

Brutal.

Not long after the referee counted the pinfall that gave Goldberg his second victory in as many days, talk of a match between Goldberg and former All-Japan Triple Crown champion Keiji Muto began making rounds. Considering that Goldberg isn't wrestling a full schedule for the company (he's contracted for a few more appearances), I'm not sure that match will happen, but it sure would be intriguing.

And though I'd rather see Goldberg take on Brock Lesnar or Triple-H, if a Goldberg vs. Muto match means that I get to take yet another trip to Japan, I'm all for it.

(Dave Lenker can be reached via e-mail at [PWIFocus@aol.com](mailto:PWIFocus@aol.com).) □



# behind the dressing room door

With Frank Krewda

**T**ODAY IS WEDNESDAY, September 11. I've been encouraged to recall the events that occurred in New York City, Washington D.C., and Shanksville, Pennsylvania, one year ago. We all have. But I don't need to watch video clips of those planes flying into the Twin Towers or read mournful tributes in the *New York Times* to remember. How do you ever forget the cowardly execution of thousands of innocent Americans?

What I do need, however, is to remind Vince McMahon that he's not fooling me. Vince McMahon thinks we're stupid. And some of us are. But I'm not. Like a lot of viewers, I sat and watched Vince, with a straight face, tell Bob Costas on HBO that he'd never in a million years exploit the September 11 tragedy in one of his wrestling company's storylines. Like a lot of viewers, I believed Vince McMahon.

Then came the Un-Americans—three Canadians whose whole gimmick is based on running down Americans for their behavior, values, and President Bush's inability to "defend his country." The very image of McMahon and other WWE personnel enthusiastically cooking up dialogue for this program ties my guts in a knot.

What galls me more is the con WWE is trying to pull. WWE runs a few politically flavored commercials, rocks the vote, and gives a million bucks to the Twin Towers Relief Fund and expects nobody to notice when it prostitutes a national horror to try to fill its coffers. Of all the institutions that mold popular culture—and professional wrestling does, as frightening as it seems—only WWE has cashed in on the pain.

Try as it might, though, WWE won't get my money. WWE's brand of patriotism is as transparent as the window McMahon tries to dress. I still can't put my finger on which is more deplorable: McMahon lying to Costas and the millions of people watching at home, or the underhanded way he's exploiting 9/11.

Rather than trot out a modern-day Iron Sheik for the fans to vilify, McMahon offers up three Canadians. Only someone as arrogant as Vince McMahon would gamble that wrestling fans are too dull to realize the only anti-American sentiments that matter nowadays are coming from the Middle East, not the Great White North. Is taking off the turban and putting a white face on hate supposed to



Christian is now one of four foreign-born wrestlers trying to make the best of the Un-Americans storyline in WWE. Frank Krewda feels it should be abandoned immediately. Actually, he feels it should never have made it to TV in the first place.



pass for tact, for conscience, for political correctness? All it really does is mask McMahon's willingness to milk 9/11 for all it's worth—and not very effectively at that.

Oddly enough, I'm somewhat sympathetic to WWE's position. The company's latest quarterly financial report wasn't too encouraging. Profits are down significantly. It's a hardscrabble economic landscape out there, and Vince needs to take care of business. That's fine. He's entitled to keep his company afloat. And I couldn't care less if he never gives another cent to charity.

But if McMahon and WWE really want to do right by the September 11 victims, the fans, and most of all, the country that allowed his business to blossom, he must treat the terrorist attacks (and the emotional aftermath) with the reverence such a catastrophe warrants. That means disbanding the Un-Americans immediately and never broaching the most remote scintilla of anti-U.S. feeling, no matter how much it costs his precious firm.

Ironically, I have even more sympathy for the "evildoers" themselves—in this case, Lance Storm, Christian, Test, and new addition William Regal, from England of all countries—who all play the part with zeal, but must be looking forward to shedding what can only be a very uncomfortable skin. Whose best interest did WWE have in mind when it ordered these men into their roles?

I'll take my hat off to the first wrestler who sprouts a pair and calls WWE's braintrust on its insensitivity and poor judgment. Then I'll give my hat to the poor sap so he can collect change on a street corner somewhere, since he'll probably be out of work shortly thereafter.

True, there are many wrestlers, past and present, who owe their careers, if not their lives, to Vince McMahon, yet I doubt he gave much consideration to how the Un-American angle would impact the lives and careers of three mid-card wrestlers.

The scars of 9/11 should be deep enough to remind him that some current events are not fodder for sports entertainment. Unfortunately, McMahon is clinging too literally to President Bush's mandate that Americans go on with life as usual.

Perhaps Bill Goldberg was correct about Vince McMahon and WWE all along. I came down hard on Goldberg when he criticized WWE for its shallow business tactics many months ago. At the time, I felt his comments were financially motivated, and I argued that linking his mixed feelings to the company's delayed reaction after



The Undertaker has played the role of great American hero against The Un-Americans (above), and a number of fans have apparently enjoyed taunting those awful Canadians (below). Yet it is still difficult to believe that even on the one-year anniversary of the darkest day in U.S. history, the storyline was still playing out.



September 11 was unfair to McMahon and all of WWE. Now I find myself being just as critical of WWE's standard operating procedures as Goldberg was—for the very same reasons. Sorry about that, Bill.

Yes, capitalism is indeed the American way, but Vince McMahon and WWE's very deliberate choice to exploit such an unfortunate occurrence was most Un-American. □



# the insider

By Brandi Mankiewicz

*(The opinions expressed in "The Insider" are those of Brandi Mankiewicz alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of anyone else on the staff of this magazine.)*

**Y**OU IDIOTS THINK you have me figured out, but you don't. I get tons of letters that share common delusions. The biggest misconception about me is that you people seem to think I hate wrestling. Honestly, I don't. In fact, I live for this sport. I just hate what's being done to it. Sure, I'm almost never positive about wrestling these days, but that's mainly because I don't like a whole heck of a lot that has happened in recent years. Just so



Jamal and Rosie ... Ekmo and Kimo. Call them what you want. I call their segments on *Raw* must-see TV. I just crack up laughing no matter whom they're squashing. Eric Bischoff has really outdone himself this time!

you don't think that I'm a total killjoy, I will share with you the things that make me smile and even giggle just so you know that I am, indeed, human.

I love Eric Bischoff and The Island Boys. They give me the best three minutes of my week. Although I'll never get used to referring to Ekmo as "Jamal" and Kimo as "Rosie," I could get used to seeing their beatdowns on a more regular basis. Much has been made of their choice in victims, but I think it's a brilliant way to get these well-deserving monsters firmly established. Seeing Mae Young get smushed was interesting, but seeing them bust up Billy and Chuck's wedding was hysterical.

I called The Boys to personally congratulate them for their efforts. They're the modern-day Road Warriors—minus the Black Sabbath music, and with a twist of the original Four Horsemen added. I was wondering when we'd see another team come into a federation and just completely dominate everything. Having the evil Bischoff as their leader only solidifies their supremacy. Who better to take orders from than the man who runs the show? Not only will they get the prime targets for their three-minutes each week, but they also have the blessings of the top guy to do their dastardly deeds.

I love Taiyo Kea, but preferably with hair. I've watched tapes of him now for years, and I enjoy watching him kick the hell out of his opponents. I know that everyone and his or her mother uses an Ace crusher variation for a finisher, but his version (a fireman's carry he turns into a stunner) is a particular favorite of mine. Maybe that's because it's just him. I do miss the Maunukea Mossman name and the mullet, though.

I love Jamie Noble and Nidia. I know it's hard for you to think that I'd enjoy a couple that has so much in common with the typical flea-bitten fan of wrestling. Once you look past their lack of couth, these two are a breath of fresh air for *Smackdown*. Sure, that air might smell like week-old trash, stale beer, pork rinds, and a stained mattress, but it's still a good thing. I had the chance to see Jamie Noble while he was perfecting his drawl in the Heartland Wrestling Association and I must say, he was my favorite character with a developmental contract. Nidia's even grown on me now that she's given herself completely to food stamp living. I just wonder, though, if she buys her outfits at the hunting supply store or if she just dumpster dives at the local Salvation Army clothes dropoff center. What can I

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# on assignment

By Liz Hunter

**A**TTENDING OVW'S "Fall Brawl" was a strange experience for me. Then again, I suppose any time a gal from New York City ventures into the South, particularly Kentucky, it's bound to feel strange. Kentuckians took the violin and made it a fiddle. Their grass is blue instead of green. Kentuckians have always scuffled to their own beat, with no regard for the trends or styles of the outside world.

That held true at "Fall Brawl," which was held in the brand-new Davis Arena. First of all, the name "Fall Brawl" has never made me think of Doug Basham, Bolin Services, Danny Davis, or anything else associated with Ohio Valley Wrestling. Instead, I think of The Four Horsemen, "War Games," Vader, "Diamond" Dallas Page, and the NWO. Now that WWE owns the rights to the names of all the former WCW pay-per-views, the people who run Ohio Valley had full blessing and permission to dub their September event—the first in the beautiful new building—"Fall Brawl."

I thought this was an insult to WCW's legacy. It was WWE getting in some more kicks at WCW's expense by allowing a developmental territory to exploit what had once been a much-anticipated event. What's next, OVW's Great American Bash?

Sure, a few WWE superstars were to appear at "Fall Brawl." Brock Lesnar, an OVW alumnus, was to defend the *Smackdown* title against "The Machine" Doug Basham in the main event. That wouldn't headline Madison Square Garden, but it was quite a coup for OVW.

I arrived at the new Davis Arena late that afternoon. Most of the wrestlers were already there, both from OVW and WWE. It wasn't until Chris Benoit arrived at the building that the show began to have a world-class



Photos by Scott Romer

Ohio Valley Wrestling fans had to be disappointed when they found out Brock Lesnar wouldn't be able to compete at the promotion's "Fall Brawl" show in September. Chris Benoit, however, quickly shut up The Revolution's Doug Basham when he announced he'd be glad to take Lesnar's spot.

feel. Perhaps it was because I had watched Benoit in so many of WCW's pay-per-views of the same name.

Then the now slightly disputed champion came through the door. I have never been so close to Brock Lesnar. He walked past me silently, carrying a duffel bag. He had the aura of a champion. He had the square jaw, smug confidence, and the broadest shoulders I've ever seen. Paul Heyman wasn't skipping alongside him, either, so there was nothing to detract from Lesnar's magnificence. I remember thinking, *Backlund, Hogan, Hart ... none of those guys has anything on Lesnar ...*

A hand slapping down on my shoulder startled me, and I heard a friendly—yet slightly irritating—voice. "That boy is fantastic, isn't he?" asked a giddy Jim Cornette.

This was really something. The most distracting human being in the universe was squawking in my ear, and I remained mesmerized as I

watched Lesnar's broad shoulders disappear down a corridor. Just imagine if I could actually see his tattoos. He could lease out his back as a drive-in theater screen ...

"Liz, am I gonna have to pack on about 200 pounds of muscle and get a bunch of tattoos to get your attention?" asked Cornette.

"Yes, that, plus you have to win the undisputed title," I responded. "So how's the show shaping up?"

"Well, as you see, Lesnar's here, but he's not cleared to wrestle," said Cornette. "He hurt his elbow, and he hasn't been to a doctor to get clearance. We've already been through all this with Jim Ross this morning. Benoit's here to replace him."

The Louisville fans would be disappointed not to have a WWE title match tonight. But Doug Basham was the most disappointed of all, and he let everyone know it after he entered the ring with the rest of The Rev-

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## capsule profile

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## STACY KEIBLER

**I**T'S HARD TO believe that Stacy Keibler, voted the hottest woman in the history of wrestling by *PWI* readers last year, probably would have never been gotten involved in the sport had she not entered a contest to decide the newest *Nitro* Girl ... In November 1999, the former Baltimore Ravens cheerleader won the contest. She took home a check for \$10,000 and joined the dance troupe as Skye (*"Pretty name, but it sure didn't last"*) ... Left the *Nitro* Girls in December 1999 and became Miss Hancock, the bespectacled, mini-skirt-wearing representative of Turner Network's Standards and Practices (*"WCW used Miss Hancock to help set its own standards and practices"*) ... Became manager Lenny and Lodi (*"So exciting to get an opportunity like that"*) ... Loved to dance seductively atop the broadcasters' table, and men everywhere loved to watch her dance ... After being dumped by Lenny and Lodi, managed Los Fabulosos, Silver King and El Dandy, for a short time ... Was manhandled by Chris Candido on the May 29, 2000, *Nitro*, but David Flair, who was seeing Daffney at the time, saved her ... On the June 13

*Thunder*, cameras caught Hancock embracing David, which infuriated Daffney (*"She couldn't handle the competition"*) ... Lost to Daffney in a wedding gown match, the object of which was to strip your opponent of her gown, at the Bash at the Beach pay-per-view when she removed her own dress voluntarily (*"That was easy enough"*) ... On the August 14 *Nitro*, one day after she "collapsed" during a match with Major Gunns at the New Blood Rising PPV, she informed

David that she was pregnant. The couple got engaged shortly thereafter ... On the September 11 edition of *Nitro*, they were to get married live on the air, but Stacy (now going by her real name) stopped the ceremony and announced that David wasn't the father of her baby ... Keibler disappeared from TV while David searched for the father ... After being off WCW TV for months, Keibler returned to *Nitro* on March 12, 2001, and re-



Stacy Keibler was not signed to a WWE contract because the company thought she'd develop into an exceptional wrestler. No, she hasn't fared well in gimmick matches with Torrie Wilson or any other diva. Yet she is a valuable member of the *Raw* roster.

vealed that she had never been pregnant ... She briefly managed Shawn Stasiak in a forgettable storyline ... WWE bought WCW in March 2001 and picked up her contract as part of the purchase ... On the June 12 *Smackdown* in her hometown of Baltimore, accompanied by WCW owner Shane McMahon, Keibler approached the ring during a match between Test (a member of Shane O'Mac's Alliance) and Rhyno. Keibler, clad in an incredibly short dress, climbed the ring

apron and distracted Rhyno, helping Test gain the victory. It was her WWE debut (*"What a rush to be back out there"*) ... With fellow Alliance member Torrie Wilson, she lost a bra and panties match to Lita and Trish Stratus at the Invasion PPV in July ... Started accompanying The Dudley Boyz to the ring in October 2001 ... Lost a lingerie match to Torrie at No Mercy that month ... On the October 23 *Smackdown*, Keibler distracted

Matt Hardy to allow Buh Buh Ray and D-Von to 3D Jeff to win the WCW World tag team title ... With Wilson again as her partner, defeated Billy and Chuck in a posedown on the February 5, 2002, *Smackdown* (*"Us against Billy and Chuck? Come on!"*) ... On the March 18 *Raw*, The Dudley Boyz ended their relationship with Stacy by putting her through a table after she caused them to lose a match against WWE World tag team champs Billy and Chuck (*"How ungrateful can you be?!"*) ... One month later, Vince McMahon hired Stacy as his personal assistant after she applied for the job by dancing atop a table for him in the middle of the ring (*"Gotta use what you have to make it*

*in this world"*) ... Didn't fare well in a series of bra and panties matches or in various other gimmick matches with Wilson, however ... After Eric Bischoff was named *Raw* general manager and Stephanie McMahon was named the *Smackdown* GM, Keibler jumped to *Raw* to become Bischoff's executive assistant ... As one of Bischoff's closest confidants, Keibler is a woman that every *Raw* employee must reckon with (*"Sexy, sweet, smart, and so savvy!"*). □



# whatever happened to...

By Scott Teal

## BRIAN BLAIR

The Brian Blair story would probably make for an interesting feel-good movie. Blair was living on his own in Tampa by the time he was 16, yet by the time he was out of Tampa Bay Technical High School, he was an honor roll student and had the record for most varsity letters held. *The Tampa Tribune* even ran a series of stories about him.

But it was wrestling that made the big difference in his life.

"I'm not rich in terms of having millions of dollars," Blair told us, "but so many facets of my life changed after I was introduced to wrestling as a youngster. From the time I was 12 years old, I did anything I could to make money. I saved my money so I could go to the Armory to watch wrestling on Tuesday night. I remember seeing Jack Brisco (Blair's hero) in the Zayre's store. I followed him all around, from aisle to aisle, being careful that he didn't see me."

Buddy Colt, one of the area's top wrestlers, and a man who lived in the apartment complex in which Brian lived, helped Brian get a shot at train-

ing with Hiro Matsuda. "Hiro sort of took me under their wing," he said. "The first day I trained, I was so nervous. I was in pretty good shape, but he made us do hundreds of Hindu squats and pushups in the hot basement of the Sportatorium. It didn't matter how much your conditioning progressed from workout to workout. Hiro exercised us until we puked. If we had any strength left, we wrestled."

Blair's big break came in 1977, when a referee didn't show for a card in Jacksonville. "They let me do the preliminary matches," he recalled. "Not long after that, I was wrestling. My first actual wrestling match was on television. Eddie Graham called me on a Tuesday night and said, 'You'll be wrestling on TV tomorrow.' Skip Young and I wrestled Pat Patterson and Ivan Koloff. They threw me outside the ring and pinned Skip."

Blair is one of the few wrestlers who used his real name in the ring, but he had nicknames. "Everybody but my mom called me B. She called me Beeber, but I didn't want anybody to know that. Unfortunately, my mom

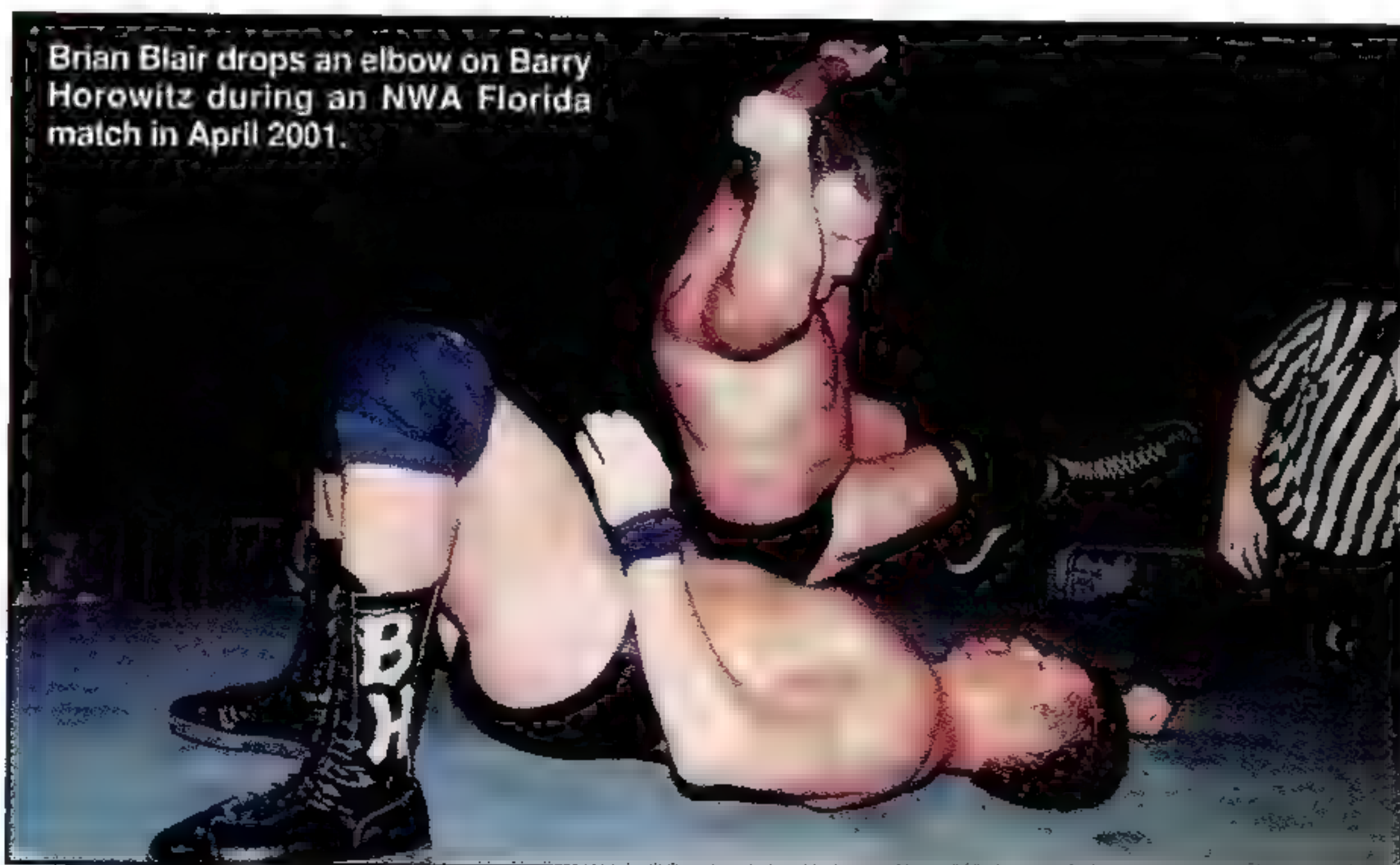


called Buddy Colt one day and said, 'Why did you let those wrestlers hurt my Beeber like that?' Of course, Buddy told everybody. Somewhere along the line, Dusty Rhodes and the Briscoes got it mixed up and started calling me Beeper. Now they all call me Beeper."

In 1984, Brian hooked up with Jim Brunzell in the WWF to form the tag team known as The Killer Bees. "Vince McMahon's gave me the 'B Brian Blair' name," he said. "And I always loved the Miami Dolphins' defense, who were known as The Killer Bees, so we adopted that."

Blair stays in touch with old friends like Brunzell, Colt, Brisco, Hulk Hogan, and Steve Keirn to this day. Much of his spare time is spent working out and playing golf and fishing with his older son. But he might not have much spare time if he is successful in his upcoming bid for the office of county commissioner of Florida's Hillsborough County.

(Scott Teal publishes the newsletter "Whatever Happened To ...?" He can be reached at: P.O. Box 2781, Hendersonville, TN 37077-2781. Web site: [www.1wrestlinglegends.com](http://www.1wrestlinglegends.com).) □



Brian Blair drops an elbow on Barry Horowitz during an NWA Florida match in April 2001.



# plain speaking

With Matt Brock

**Harder than nails, veteran wrestling reporter Matt Brock has logged more miles covering wrestling than any other journalist. Every month Matt will travel to the sport's hotbeds, reporting everything he sees without fear or favor**

**TOKYO, JAPAN:** Want to know how the world has changed since the horrific events of September 11, 2001? Instead of just suffering through a 12-hour flight to Japan, now I have to struggle through the flight, wait in the airport an extra two or three hours, get frisked by three or four separate security guards, take off my shoes, and explain what a word processor is to two baggage handlers ... in Japanese, no less. I've made this trip more times than I care to count, but that doesn't make it any more enjoyable, especially when you see a familiar face, this time Dave Lenker's ugly mug, has made the trip as well. ¶While I can appreciate the no-frills style of wrestling in Japan, I just wish I didn't have to travel halfway around the globe to see it. Why can't one of

the Japanese companies open some kind of farm territory back here in the U.S., if only to give us homebodies a chance to see some quality wrestling without having to spend nearly a full day round trip over the Pacific? There wasn't any way I was going to miss this trip to Tokyo. Bill Goldberg (big guy, heck of a spear, remember?) was wrestling his first match in more than 19 months against Satoshi Kojima at Budokan Hall. Kojima's no pushover, and as far as I'm concerned, it says a lot about Goldberg's confidence level that he's willing to deal with the jet lag, lousy food, and stiff hotel mattresses and face a guy he's never so much as seen before right off the bat. ¶More than 12,000 fans packed Budokan Hall for the match, and Goldberg didn't disap-

point. He seemed a little stiff, but 19 months on the DL will do that to a man. Goldberg only needed about four minutes to put away Kojima. Got a few minutes with Bill after the match. Said his arm is still hurting, and he's not quite ready to dust off the old jackhammer yet. Also said I was about the 3,455<sup>th</sup> person to ask him if he's going to WWE, and if so, when. Pressured him for an answer as best I could, and he just laughed and shook his head. "Brock, I haven't made up my mind yet," he said. "Maybe I'll



BILL GOLDBERG WITH MIKE BARTON IN JAPAN



wrestle here full-time. I'll let you know as soon as I figure everything out." Can't wait for my next trip over. Probably be for the big Joanie Laurer-Masa Chono match. Is Vince McMahon secretly promoting matches in the Orient?

**NASHVILLE, TN:** You gotta hand it to Bob Armstrong—the man just doesn't know the meaning of the word quit. About 10 years ago, some folks were saying he was out of his mind leading the Armstrong Army against Jim Cornette's troops in Smoky Mountain Wrestling. Here we are, nearly a full decade later, and Bob's making life miserable for Jeff Jarrett in NWA-TNA. Jarrett has been harassed by a masked man going by the name of The Bullet, which used to be Armstrong's alter ego. ¶This new Bullet is clearly in Jarrett's head. Jarrett had his hands full with the masked man tonight, that is, until he pulled out a pair of handcuffs and cuffed Bullet to the top rope. Armstrong gamely ran in to make the save, but he took a pair of stiff chair shots for his efforts. Ol' Bob is okay in the physical sense, but he's none too happy. Believe me, that can't be good news for Jarrett. There are certain people you just don't want to get on the wrong side of, and Bob Armstrong, even if he is a senior citizen, is at the top of the list. ¶One thing's for sure, Jarrett's not going to get any closer to Ron Killing's NWA title if Armstrong has anything to say about it. And I think he does.

**AMES, IA:** Jim Ross likes to remind us that *WWE Raw* is the longest-running live prime time wrestling program in history. I could argue the semantics of that point, but not in this column. Anyway, *Raw* features the likes of Triple-H, Rob Van Dam, Kane, Booker T, Chris Jericho, and

Ric Flair each and every week. And tonight, the focal point of the show was HLA. Since you already know what that stands for, I'm not going to belabor the point. Believe it or not, Matt Brock is no prude. Hell, I've watched wrestling for more than 50 years now. I've seen just about every offensive character or situation you can imagine. Hey, if HLA is your cup of tea, here's to you, but don't bring it into my workplace. Most likely, there's a rundown movie theater somewhere in your town that has just what you're looking for. ¶These days, between videotapes and that Internet thing that my niece Brandi Mankiewicz keeps telling me about, you can probably get yourself a steady stream of whatever you're looking for right in the comfort of your own basement. Again, I wouldn't know and I don't care. However, I do know this: People don't watch pro wrestling for HLA. Not real wrestling fans anyway. Walking out of the arena tonight, I had a sick feeling in my stomach. I felt ashamed for even being at the WWE card. It's the same feeling I imagine those derelicts frequenting the dirty picture shows have when they leave the theater. I can only imagine how many people had that same feeling watching at home. Those people tuned in for wrestling and maybe a little sports entertainment and came away with something else entirely. The people who felt that sick feeling—well, I don't expect them to tune back anytime soon.



BOB ARMSTRONG

**MINNEAPOLIS, MN:** From HLA to something called a commitment ceremony. Desperate times apparently call for ridiculous measures. To be honest, this didn't bother me nearly as much as *Raw*'s shenanigans, which tells you a lot. At least Chuck Palumbo and Billy Gunn are talented wrestlers underneath all the stupid gimmicks. I'm looking forward to seeing what Palumbo and Gunn can do against Rosie and Jamal over the next few months. From what I've seen from both teams, we're in for a long battle here. ¶Here's what I want to see: Put all four guys in a cage, ban Rico (where did he go wrong, anyway?), Bischoff, and Stephanie from ringside—hell, ban them from the state—and let the blood fly. Both these teams are going to surprise a lot of people, and if they can carry on a feud across some stupid brand boundaries, we might even be looking at a classic here. □





# PRESENTING THE 2002 TURNBUCKLE TURKEY AWARDS!

**F**OR THE SECOND year in a row, every major television network repelled our efforts to get this year's Turnbuckle Turkey Awards on TV—and we tried hard. We called every network executive we could think of, scheduled big, important meetings with big, important men and women, and pretended to be bigger and more important than we actually are. For some reason that defies reasonable explanation, it didn't work. Much to our dismay, *INSIDE WRESTLING* is the only place you'll find the TTAs.

Fox executives said that they couldn't find space between showings of *When Animals Attack XVII* and *Temptation Island*. When we pressed further, they pointed to *Celebrity Boxing* and said that if we could draw better numbers than a match between Barry Williams of *Brady Bunch* fame and Danny Bonaduce of *Partridge Family* fame, that slot could be ours.

We smartly walked away. Ain't no way we're competing with a *Brady Bunch-Partridge Family* battle royal.

Viacom executives (who control CBS, UPN, TNN, and MTV) pulled out a form letter and handed it over to us within seconds of our proposal. The letter said that because Viacom is contractually obligated to WWE, an *INSIDE WRESTLING* award show on any of its networks would be a serious conflict of interest.

They must have known we were coming.

NBC officials said they'd think about it, but only after the company had recouped all of the money it lost on the XFL debacle. We plan on having a followup meeting with them sometime in 2032.

ABC security guards pointed to their free Mickey Mouse coffee mugs before escorting us out of corporate headquarters.

WB network execs actually seemed interested, but once we realized to whom we were talking, we asked where the bathrooms were located and never returned.

We're desperate, but not *that* desperate!

We made one last attempt with E!, but when its executives said that they were worried our TTAs would steal advertising revenue from their top-rated *Howard Stern* show, we knew we weren't going anywhere. There's only



so much *Girls Gone Wild* money to go around, you know.

So, instead, we're back here—inside the pages of *INSIDE WRESTLING*. For those who are new to the TTAs and are wondering just what in the heck we're all about, here's a quick overview of our favorite award show (?) of the year.

The TTAs are awards of the worst kind. If you're a wrestler or someone associated with the wrestling business, a golden turkey is the last thing that you want to receive. Because if you do get one, it means that not only have you done something stupid, you've done something abjectly asinine, such as selling WCW for \$2.5-million when you could have gotten so much more for it, which is what AOL Time Warner officials did last year to earn their first (and probably last) golden turkey.

If you're still reading this even though you've figured out that none of the above claims about all those meetings is true, thanks, we appreciate it. Also, please let us know what you think of the section you're about to read. Write to us at Turnbuckle Turkeys, Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034, or e-mail us at [insideletters@yahoo.com](mailto:insideletters@yahoo.com).

If enough of you respond, maybe we'll consider going the NWA-TNA route and trying our hand at pay-per-view next year. At 95 cents a pop, we might not be able to grab your attention with big stars, colorful graphics, or adequate lighting, but who cares about that stuff, right?

Now, on with the show ...





## 2002 TURNBUCKLE TURKEY AWARDS

### THE UN-AMERICANS

On September 11, 2001, America was attacked by members of the al Qaeda terrorist organization, attacked like it had never been attacked before.

The group flew two hijacked planes into New York's World Trade Center, turning the Twin Towers into gigantic piles of rubble and killing thousands of civilians. A third hijacked plane flew into the Pentagon, striking the Department of Defense's headquarters and killing nearly 200 more. A couple of states away in rural Pennsylvania, a number of brave Americans overtook hijackers and forced the jet down before terrorists could use it as a weapon of mass destruction. All on board were killed.

At first, the attacks numbed the nation. However, it wasn't long before the country found its feet—and shock gave way to patriotism. The American flag suddenly became so much more than a symbol; Old Glory was reborn in big cities, small towns, urban ghettos, and suburban cul-de-sacs.

On September 10, 2001, America was a country separated by many boundaries, with race, creed, and economics standing being just a few of the culprits.

On September 11, 2001, those boundaries were removed as love of country became the nation's predominant theme.

What was once many became one.

Lance Storm, Christian, and Test, collectively known as The Un-Americans, are using America's newfound patriotism to move up WWE's ladder. Whether or not they'll admit it—and they probably won't—they're using the attacks of September 11 to their benefit. They're tapping into America's sorrow, rage, and patriotism to garner themselves a higher spot on the card. They're launching verbal attacks on America to fatten their wallets with hard-earned U.S. dollars and laughing about it in front of our very eyes.

Though it might seem harsh to say, it's the awful truth: They're jabbing at the emotional wounds of this nation at a time when the wounds are not even close to being healed.

And all for money.

It's a horrible, disgusting thought, and we wish that it weren't the case, but it's true. How else can you explain the trio's actions? They accused President

George W. Bush of being weak. They verbally abused the American public by leveling one shameful charge after another. And, on two successive weeks, they tried to burn the American flag live on national TV.

Disgusting and disgraceful don't even begin to describe their actions. Lance Storm would probably say that he's been forced into his role as an Un-American, that if he had his choice, he'd earn his keep another way. "After all," Storm would likely argue, "Vince McMahon signs my paychecks, and he's forcing me to act this way. If I don't, I'm out of a job."

We wouldn't buy that story from anyone, but especially not from Lance Storm. In a sport that's riddled with competitors who live hard and party even harder, Storm is different. He takes care of his body the all-natural way, and from all accounts, he doesn't stray from his strict regimen. He has a reputation for being the cleanest-living wrestler on the WWE roster.

Yet he still made it to the big time—that's how good he is. He's so good that he could at least *try* to tell Vince McMahon, "No, I don't want to act that way," and maybe get away with it. So are Christian and Test.

Their refusal to do the right thing in this case doesn't make them Un-American. It just makes them despicable.



The upside-down American flag, the T-shirts, the ridiculous rhetoric, and so on. Test ought to be ashamed of himself for going full speed ahead with this Un-Americans junk at such a sensitive time. Same for Christian and Lance Storm. Heck, same for WWE!





## 2002 TURNBUCKLE TURKEY AWARDS

### DON HARRIS

Well, aren't we off to a pleasant start? First, we lambasted three men who are using the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, to their benefit. Now we're moving on to Don Harris, who acts as NWA-TNA's head of security and wrestled on the promotion's August 14 show wearing a T-shirt featuring Nazi propaganda.

We're feeling all warm and toasty inside. How about you?

That's right, you read that correctly. On the August 14 NWA-TNA pay-per-view, Harris wrestled Malice sporting a T-shirt that featured the "S" lightning logo that was worn by the Nazi army.

Unlike WWE's Un-American angle, however, at least NWA-TNA didn't knowingly send Harris into the ring wearing Nazi paraphernalia (or at least we don't believe it did). Shortly after the episode aired, NWA-TNA, to its credit, released the following statement on its Web site:

"On the August 14 episode of NWA-TNA: Total Nonstop Action, one of our performers wore a shirt to the ring that had an offensive symbol that prompted many of our fans to e-mail us. We were not aware of the incident until we received the response from our fans, and we agree with those who say the shirt was offensive. We do not in any way condone such things and have taken steps to make sure something like that doesn't happen again. We apologize to those who were rightfully offended."

In NWA-TNA's defense, missing a symbol of hate isn't hard to do; they're very easy to dismiss as just another meaningless design. Just this past August, retail giant Target had to pull a clothing line emblazoned with neo-Nazi hate symbols from its shelves. The company was selling shorts and baseball caps inscribed with the phrases "Eight Eight," "Eighty Eight," and "88"—code for "Heil Hitler"—until the Southern Poverty Law Center, a nonprofit organization that combats

hate and discrimination, alerted the company to the clothing line's hidden meaning.

But even if NWA-TNA officials were completely unaware of the T-shirt's message—and again, we have to believe they *were* unaware—they must make 100 percent sure that such a similar transgression never happens again. Every week, TNA broadcasts to prospective new fans, whether they're watching the promotion for the very first time at home or at a friend's house. The promotion can't afford to turn away a paying customer by featuring a wrestler with such horribly skewed political beliefs.

As for Harris, everyone has a right to believe what he or she wants to believe. We, on the other hand, have a right to ignore what we want to ignore.

Think of how much trouble and embarrassment Don Harris could have saved NWA-TNA had he opted to wear this shirt on the night of August 14!







## 2002 TURNBUCKLE TURKEY AWARDS

### STEVE AUSTIN

"O 'Stone-Cold,' 'Stone-Cold'! Wherefore art thou, 'Stone-Cold'?"

You might not be subjected to many Shakespeare references on WWE TV, but there's no doubt that when Austin went M.I.A. from WWE earlier this year, there were many WWE officials scratching their heads and wondering just where in the heck the six-time former WWE World heavyweight champion was hiding out.

After all, Austin was one of the most popular wrestlers in the company's history, and he was never one to walk away at crunch time. Prior to this year, Austin always exuded a personality that suggested he would do just the opposite. Whenever a challenge came his way, he didn't run from it. No way! He stood up to it, stared it square in the eye, and then spat some beer in its face and gave it a hell-raising "Stone-Cold" stunner.

There was nothing that Steve Austin wouldn't—or couldn't—conquer. That was then, this is now. Perhaps feeling the weight of the promotion fall on his shoulders for too many years and watching his partner in crime, The Rock, experience the Hollywood career that he thought could be his, Austin walked out of WWE in June for the second time since WrestleMania.

We're not completely sure why Austin decided to walk just hours before a *Raw* scheduled to feature him prominently was to begin. We've only gotten the WWE side of the story, and that's been pretty, well, one-sided. It is safe to say, however, that Austin wasn't satisfied with the direction that his career was headed and that he was questioning Vince McMahon's decision-making about WWE as a whole.

Instead of being miserable at work, he went home.

After Austin walked out, WWE buried its former franchise player. It called him every name imaginable and devoted a whole episode of *Confidential* to explaining how wrong and unprofessional he was. His best friend in the company, Jim Ross, even called him out a couple of times. Once the cornerstone of WWE, Austin became its whipping boy.

It didn't have to be that way. Austin could have asked for a sabbatical, and he probably would have been given one, maybe with full pay. He busted his tail for WWE and made the company more money than probably anyone else in its history. For that reason alone it's hard to imagine that Vince McMahon wouldn't have given Austin a few months off to recharge his batteries.

Austin also wouldn't have left the company in a lurch had he given a few weeks notice. Storylines could've been seen to completion, and WWE's writers could

have come up with a creative excuse for his extended absence. After a few months, Austin might have returned to WWE fresher and more motivated than ever.

We don't want to make fun of Austin. Since leaving WWE, he's had to deal with serious personal problems, problems that include him being arrested on an alleged domestic violence incident with wife Debra, and his decision to file for divorce that he has since withdrawn. It's just horrible to see a man who devoted so much of his life to wrestling—and helped it become bigger and better than anyone ever thought possible—sink so low.

Let's hope he comes back someday and provides us all with some more wonderful memories.



We'd much rather be writing about whom Steve Austin stunned last week or which jackass he doused with beer than speculating about his meltdown and his legal problems and trying to figure out why he walked out on his job.





## 2002 TURNBUCKLE TURKEY AWARDS

### JAMAL AND ROSIE

How do you define tough? Better yet, how do you define a tough wrestler? Is Triple-H tough? After ripping his quadriceps in half during a match in 2001, he withstood a Walls of Jericho on the announce table and finished his match before being helped to the back. (Sounds tough to us.) How about Chris Benoit? He reclaimed his status as one of the sport's best mat technicians after major neck surgery and a year away from the sport. (That definitely sounds tough.) Of course, when talking about tough, how can you ignore The Undertaker? He's one of the oldest competitors on WWE's roster, yet he continues to hang in there with guys a decade or more his junior. (He's so hard-as-nails tough that he gets away with it.)

How about the following scenario? Do these guys sound tough?

Two large, burly men, decked out in the best street thug attire that money can buy, attack two elderly women, a songbird who has never even so much as thumb-wrestled, an old, retired champion whose best days happened two decades ago, and a wee munchkin whose only crime was being a bit too randy in the backstage area.

Again, do the two thugs perpetrating such heinous crimes sound tough to you?

Nah, they don't sound tough to us, either. What they sound like are two hoods who aren't brave enough to step up and challenge men their own size, yet who are more than willing to pick on the frail, elderly, and defenseless.

Those are the actions of bullies, and bullies aren't tough. That's why they're bullies: They're not willing to stand on their own and be liked and respected for who they are. So, instead, they put on a tough guy persona and fake their way through their lives—until someone steps up and puts them in their place.

Pretty soon, that's exactly what's going to happen to Rosie and Jamal, Eric Bischoff's three-minute men. They're going to pick on the wrong person, and then they'll have their big butts handed to them.

We'd like to see it happen sooner rather than later. Bischoff has brought many innovations to *Raw*, and some, such as moving the announcers away

from the ring, we appreciate. Rosie and Jamal, however, are another story. We wish Bischoff had left these two guys on the street corner that he first found them on. Maybe then they'd have a chance of getting arrested for their crimes.

There is hope for the twosome, however. They grew up in and around the wrestling business, and they know how it works. They were very impressive and very successful in WWE's developmental territories as Ekmo and Kimo, The Island Boys. Perhaps they're saddling up to Bischoff because they know that if he needs them, their positions on the payroll are secure.

At some point, they'll have to make a go of it on their own. Perhaps we'll consider changing our assessment of them then. But we might not even give them three minutes to make an argument for themselves.



We expected Jamal and Rosie—the former Island Boys—to inject some excitement into a stagnant WWE tag team division once they finally debuted on TV. Instead, they've become hired thugs for Eric Bischoff, and they seem to relish beating up people who can't offer much resistance.





## 2002 TURNBUCKLE TURKEY AWARDS

### SHANE DOUGLAS

Shane Douglas loves controversy. He's been surrounded by it throughout his career. If he wasn't throwing down the NWA heavyweight title in favor of the ECW heavyweight championship, he was venting against Vince McMahon for his "Dean Douglas" character. If he wasn't venting against McMahon, he was complaining about ECW owner Paul Heyman. If he wasn't complaining about Heyman, he was saying that Chris Benoit, Eddie Guerrero, Dean Malenko, and Perry Saturn stabbed him in the back when they secured releases from WCW and went to WWE without him. And if he wasn't complaining about any of those things, he was busy "shooting" his mouth off to whomever would listen.

When WCW was sold to WWE in March 2001, we were free of Douglas' ramblings for a little while, because Douglas was under contract to AOL Time Warner until April 2002 and wasn't about to give up the money owed to him. And once his contract with AOL Time Warner expired, it still took him a few months to step inside the squared circle.

One of Douglas' first matches back was for Major League Wrestling, one of the myriad promotions that's been competing for the Philadelphia audience in recent months. Douglas competed in—and won—the group's inaugural tournament to crown its first-ever champion. He went through Steve Corino (a former ECW World champion), Jerry Lynn (another former ECW World champion), and both Vampiro and All-Japan's Taiyo Kea in a three-way tournament finale to win the title.

Now, looking at the men Douglas had to beat to win the title (Corino, Lynn, Kea, and Vampiro), and considering the other competitors in the tournament (La Parka, The Wall, and Christopher Daniels), you'd think that Douglas would be proud of his new championship belt.

Nope! In it-worked-for-me-once-so-here-it-goes-again form, Douglas threw down the MLW championship and said that he didn't want to be the champion of a wannabe promotion; it was almost an exact repeat of what he did with the NWA title eight years ago.

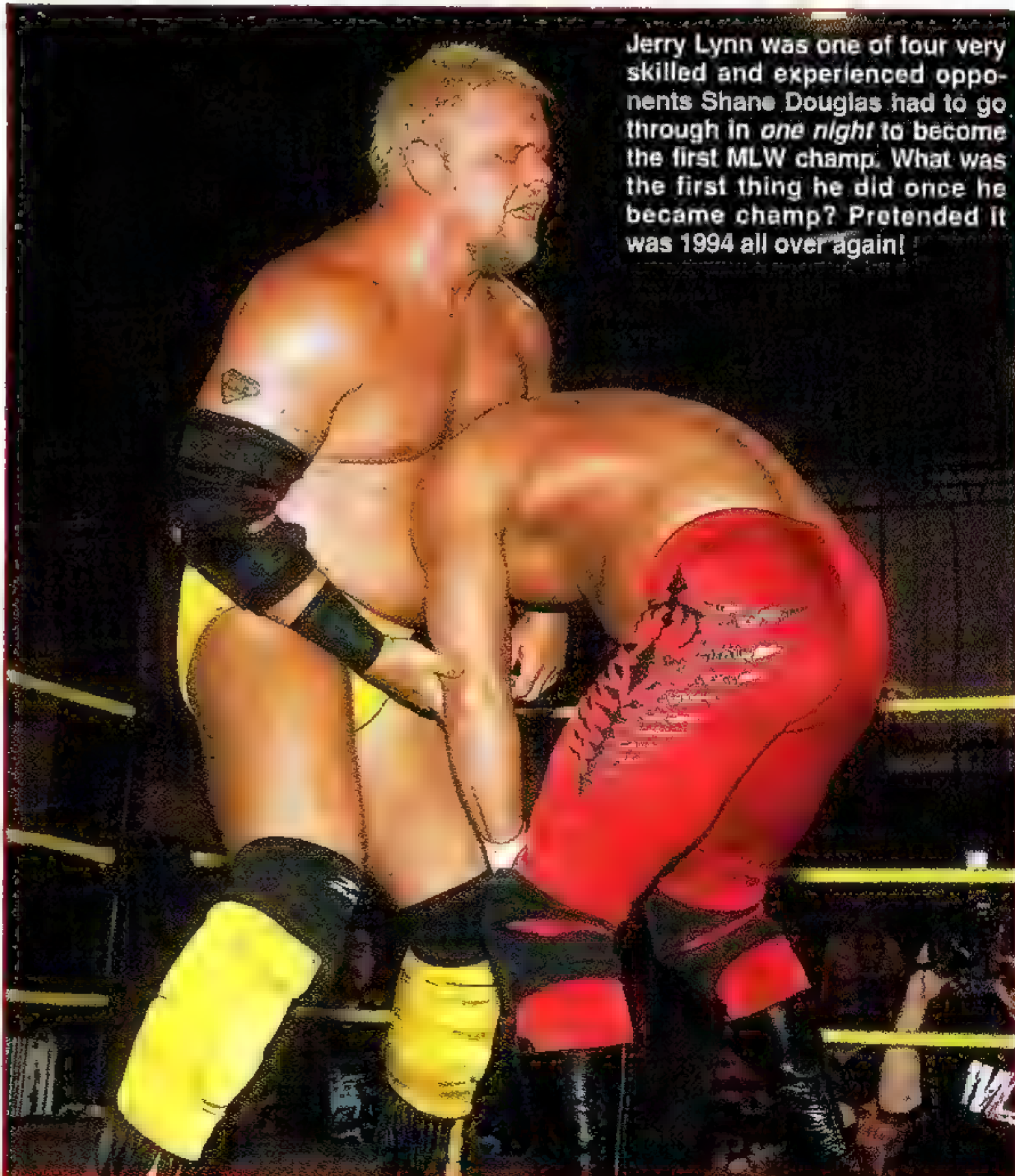
Zero points for originality, and negative points for common sense. A wanna-

be promotion? Hey, any group that can book such a diverse and international roster of wrestlers for its first show is okay in our magazine.

And that's not the only reason that Douglas makes this year's TTAs. He also came off as quite the turkey when he refused to work for NWA-TNA in part because "The Queen Of Extreme" Francine, his former valet in ECW with whom he's had a falling-out, was working for the promotion. (Beggars can't do much choosing in this WWE-dominant age.)

And there's more! Can you believe it! During XPW's debut at Viking Hall (the former ECW Arena) in August, XPW champion Douglas boasted that he had purchased the famed bingo hall and that other promotions would have to "kiss his ass" if they wanted to run there again. Now this was a very odd storyline to go forward with, because neither Douglas nor XPW had purchased the building, and Combat Zone Wrestling and 3PW were both planning to run there in the coming weeks.

Congratulations, Shane! That's three TTAs for the price of one!



Jerry Lynn was one of four very skilled and experienced opponents Shane Douglas had to go through in *one* night to become the first MLW champ. What was the first thing he did once he became champ? Pretended it was 1994 all over again!





## 2002 TURNBUCKLE TURKEY AWARDS

### LARRY ZBYSZKO

The consensus following World Wrestling All-Stars' first-ever live pay-per-view, WWA: The Revolution, was that the show featured bad lighting, bad production values, too many ex-stars, and too many unknowns. There was also a feeling that nearly everyone on the pay-per-view was bucking for a job with World Wrestling Entertainment—even those guys who explicitly said that that's exactly what they *weren't* doing.

"The Living Legend" isn't so legendary anymore, and, no, we're not talking about Chris Jericho. Former AWA World heavyweight champion Larry Zbyszko is our culprit for this Turnbuckle Turkey Award, because unlike Kenny Rogers, he doesn't know when to hold them, fold them, walk away, or even run.

(Any of the above would have been preferable to what Zbyszko did at Revolution, which was about as stupid as showing all of your cards before the other players have even put their chips on the table.)

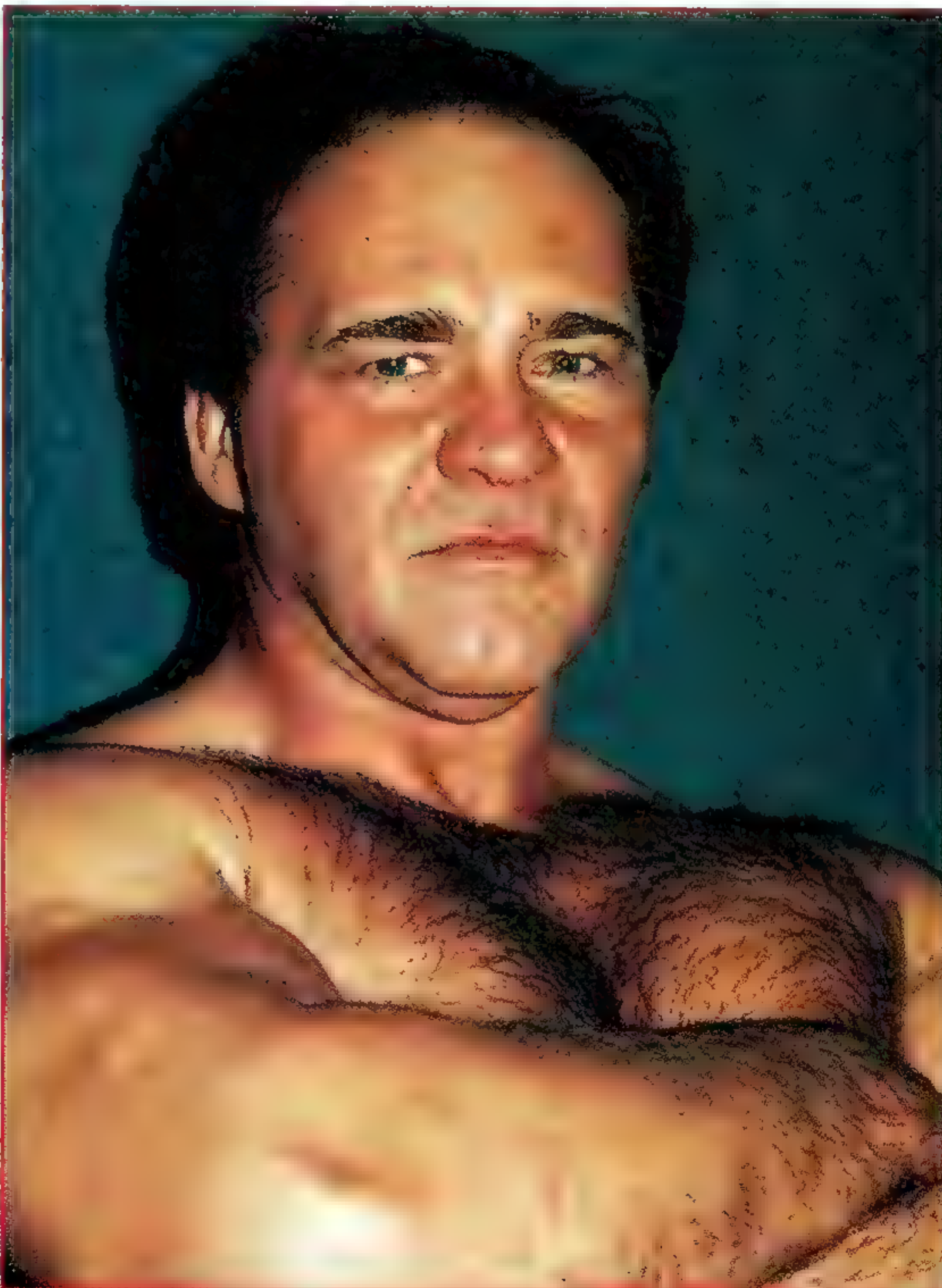
To be fair, even though it ended up being a serious mistake, we can see why WWA officials chose to give Zbyszko time behind the microphone. As the last-ever AWA champion, it was his job to make the championship look important when it wasn't—and he did a damn good job of it. Back then, he boasted about accomplishments that weren't all that extraordinary, yet somehow he convinced fans that his actions were significant and that he and the AWA still mattered. That was one of Zbyszko's greatest strengths as a champion. His promos convinced you that he had the utmost belief in himself, and most of the time that's all a wrestler has to do to become successful. If a champion convinces the fans he is who he says he is, 99 percent of the time, he'll get himself and his company over.

Unfortunately, Zbyszko was cutting the last of those meaningful-yet-meaningless promos more than a decade ago, and he hasn't been one of the sport's best promo men since that time. Since his run at the top of the AWA, men like The Rock and "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin have upped the ante in that department tenfold, and Ric Flair is the one of the

few old-timers who can verbally compete with the sport's hottest younger guns.

Zbyszko's promo also made it clear that he doesn't understand you, Joe Wrestling Fan. His long-winded, boorish promo, directed at Vince McMahon and Chris Jericho (WWE's newly crowned "Living Legend") might have gotten a jaw-dropping reaction before the shoot-style interview became popular, but all Zbyszko did by challenging McMahon to a fight and calling Jericho short was paint himself a bitter man.

By publicly saying that he wouldn't work for McMahon, Zbyszko was likely hoping that McMahon would get an idea for a shoot-style storyline and sign him to a contract. His intention seemed obvious, and it was pathetic. It was also a waste of valuable air time for a promotion that was hoping to make an impact in the U.S. and needed to make a good impression with its paying customers.



Larry Zbyszko is still a pretty good talker, but what he had to say at the WWA's first pay-per-view in the U.S. was just flat-out embarrassing. It was also a waste of time.





## 2002 TURNBUCKLE TURKEY AWARDS

# THE FLIGHTY FLIGHT

There are all kinds of reasons to behave while flying nowadays. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the crumbling of the airline industry, and the shaky air marshal program have all made the friendly skies pretty unfriendly.

Someone should give WWE an update on all of that, because earlier this year, the company had an in-flight fiasco that made headlines in the United States and in Europe.

Before we begin, we need to provide a little background. The flight, which was from Europe to the United States and followed a very successful WWE European tour, wasn't a commercial flight. There were no average business or pleasure travelers on board. It was a chartered flight, and everyone aboard was a WWE employee. And because the flight was a chartered flight, alcohol was flowing freely, and the atmosphere was light.

At least three incidents took place during the flight, and all were serious in one way or another.

The first incident involved Bradshaw, X-Pac, and Michael "P.S." Hayes, who has been featured as a broadcaster on WWE TV in recent years. According to many reports, Hayes was rather loud and obnoxious on the flight, and he aimed a punch at Bradshaw's forehead, which was cut during the tour and susceptible to reopening. Bradshaw got upset, but The Undertaker stepped in before things got out of hand. Once Hayes fell asleep, however, X-Pac decided to cut off his prized ponytail. When he woke up, Hayes started leveling accusations, particularly at Gerald Brisco, but X-Pac stood up and admitted culpability. Luckily, things settled down from there.

Incident number two involved Goldust, a.k.a. Dustin Runnels, and his ex-wife, Terri. For some strange reason, Goldust decided to serenade Terri with love songs, and although the two have enjoyed a good relationship since they divorced, she wasn't the least bit pleased. The incident made her extremely uncomfortable—for obvious reasons—and her body language reportedly made that very clear, but Goldust only stopped singing after he was told to stop by WWE management on board the flight.

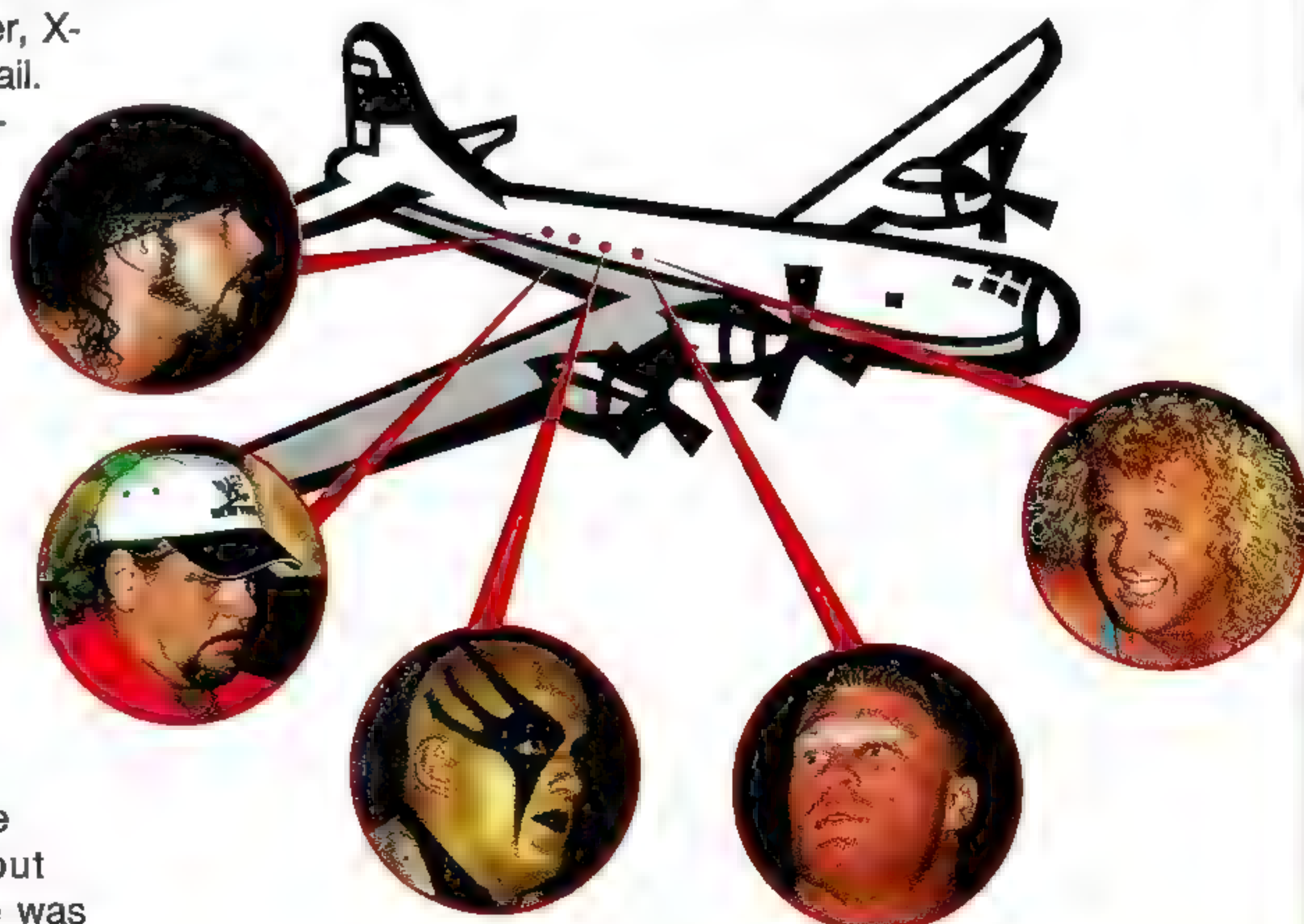
The third incident, a scuffle between "Mr. Perfect" Curt Hennig and Brock Lesnar, was undoubtedly the most serious, as it led to Hennig's release from his WWE contract.

According to published reports, Hennig was ribbing Lesnar throughout the flight back to the States about which man was the better shooter/amateur wrestler. A former NCAA champion in the heavyweight division, Lesnar took umbrage at Hennig's poor attempt at humor, and the two men started scuffling down the aisleway.

At one point they came very close to wrestling into one of the plane's doors, scaring many of their co-workers on board who thought that they might jar it open.

Considering that WWE Vice President of Talent Relations Jim Ross and a number of road agents were aboard the plane when all these incidents took place, we have to wonder how the wrestlers' behavior managed to get so out of hand. Vince McMahon chastised many of those on board after the fact—and Hennig was fired—but incidents like these just shouldn't take place. All they do is present a black eye to the general public and turn away potential investors of WWE stock. Mainstream media coverage of professional wrestling is tainted enough, but incidents like this have the ability to make things so much worse.

Yes, the chartered WWE flight from Europe back to the States this spring must have been quite the experience. And hardly a pleasant experience for most!







## 2002 TURNBUCKLE TURKEY AWARDS

### ANTONIO INOKI

He went from being the biggest icon in Japanese wrestling to being one of *puroresu's* running in-jokes, and it has never been more obvious than it's been this past year. Antonio Inoki, pro wrestler, promoter, politician, and pop culture figure extraordinaire, is now best known for his inane antics in disguise as a hobo among the homeless population of Japan, and for lying to the press on practically a weekly basis. For this, we must award him a gleaming Turnbuckle Turkey Award.

Inoki is a complex figure, to be sure. Protege of the legendary Rikidozan, Inoki founded New Japan Pro Wrestling and became its biggest star for more than a decade. He parlayed his wrestling superstardom into a political career, serving in the Japanese Diet (Senate) despite being surrounded by scandal. On New Year's Eve, Inoki's fans pack into an arena to watch *puroresu* and vie for position to get slapped on the head by Inoki—that's how he transfers his "fighting spirit" on to others. Believe it or not, fans almost trample each other for a chance to be slapped by Inoki.

It's Inoki, though, that could use a good slap. Just about every big show Inoki has tried to promote in the last year has been marred by mediocre or embarrassing attendance figures and bogus claims Inoki can't back up. His UFO group played the Tokyo Dome in early-August 2002, bringing in a record crowd of 5,000 people. That's a record *low*—the smallest draw by a pro wrestling company in the history of the Dome. This number apparently proves that even the Japanese press has begun to see through Inoki's ridiculous hype job.

A week before the card, after early ticket sales looked sluggish, Inoki announced he'd be bringing in former boxing champions Mike Tyson and Thomas Hearns to augment the UFO lineup. Of course, neither Tyson nor Hearns was even in Japan the day of the event, and fans have gotten wise to Inoki's silly attempts to boost ticket sales. In fact, Inoki has claimed to have booked matches for Tyson in Japan for more than a year now—and he still hasn't pulled it off.

New Japan matchmakers aren't the least bit thrilled with Inoki's ongoing influence over NJPW shows, either. He recently arranged for his friend Joanie Laurer, the former Chyna, to face New Japan's biggest star, Masa Chono, in a singles match. The day after it was announced, fan outrage forced the New Japan

office to change its plans.

Thanks to Inoki, Laurer has plenty of work in Japan now. In fact, she was scheduled to captain a team of men to face off against New Japan regulars like Yuji Nagata (the current IWGP heavyweight champion), Jushin Liger, and Kensuke Sasaki. Fans were so thrilled by the idea of these matches that early interest in tickets for those cards was well below the norm for New Japan shows.

But fear not. If the promise of a Laurer vs. Nagata title match didn't move tickets, Inoki could always just add Mike Tyson to the lineup.



It's true that Antonio Inoki does occasionally dress like a hobo so that he can deliver his "fighting spirit" to members of the homeless population in Japan. It's also true that he does a lot of other ridiculous things.





## 2002 TURNBUCKLE TURKEY AWARDS

### VINCE McMAHON

After reviewing this year's list of TTA winners, we've concluded that Vince McMahon could have received this golden turkey for any number of reasons. No matter how horrible The Un-Americans act in the ring, they wouldn't do so without Vince McMahon's blessing. The same goes for Howard Finkel, and for Rosie and Jamal. And what in the world did "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin do to deserve such harsh treatment? WWE's outright burial of Austin on TV and in print made it seem like McMahon wanted to make sure that Austin would never want to come back to the promotion—and that's silly considering how popular the guy is.

But it was McMahon's mishandling of Vince Russo's return to WWE that earned him this year's honor.

If you remember, Russo was McMahon's creative partner in the birth of that late-1990s phenomenon called WWF Attitude. A former magazine writer, Russo helped craft the storylines that turned Austin, The Rock, Mick Foley, and Triple-H into megastars. He fought for his ideas even if McMahon didn't like them at first—a boldness that McMahon had rarely seen from one of his office employees. After helping *Raw* topple *WCW Monday Nitro* in the ratings, he was McMahon's golden child. He was able to get away with so much more than the average employee.

Their relationship suddenly ended in October 1999, when Russo, upset with the lack of credit he was receiving for the WWF's extraordinary turnaround, jumped ship to WCW without giving notice. McMahon was said to be deeply hurt. Russo was as close to being a McMahon family member as an outsider could be, and Russo's defection stung. It also made him realize that he had left his flank exposed. Not long after Russo's departure, McMahon made sure that most of his important employees were locked into contracts. At the time, it was believed that McMahon would never welcome Russo into the family again.

In June 2002, however, that's exactly what McMahon did—despite the fact that Russo's tenure as head of WCW creative was downright miserable. McMahon brought Russo back into the fold and reintroduced the new creative director to a rather shocked WWE creative team, including Stephanie McMahon, who reportedly had no idea that her father was bringing Russo back.

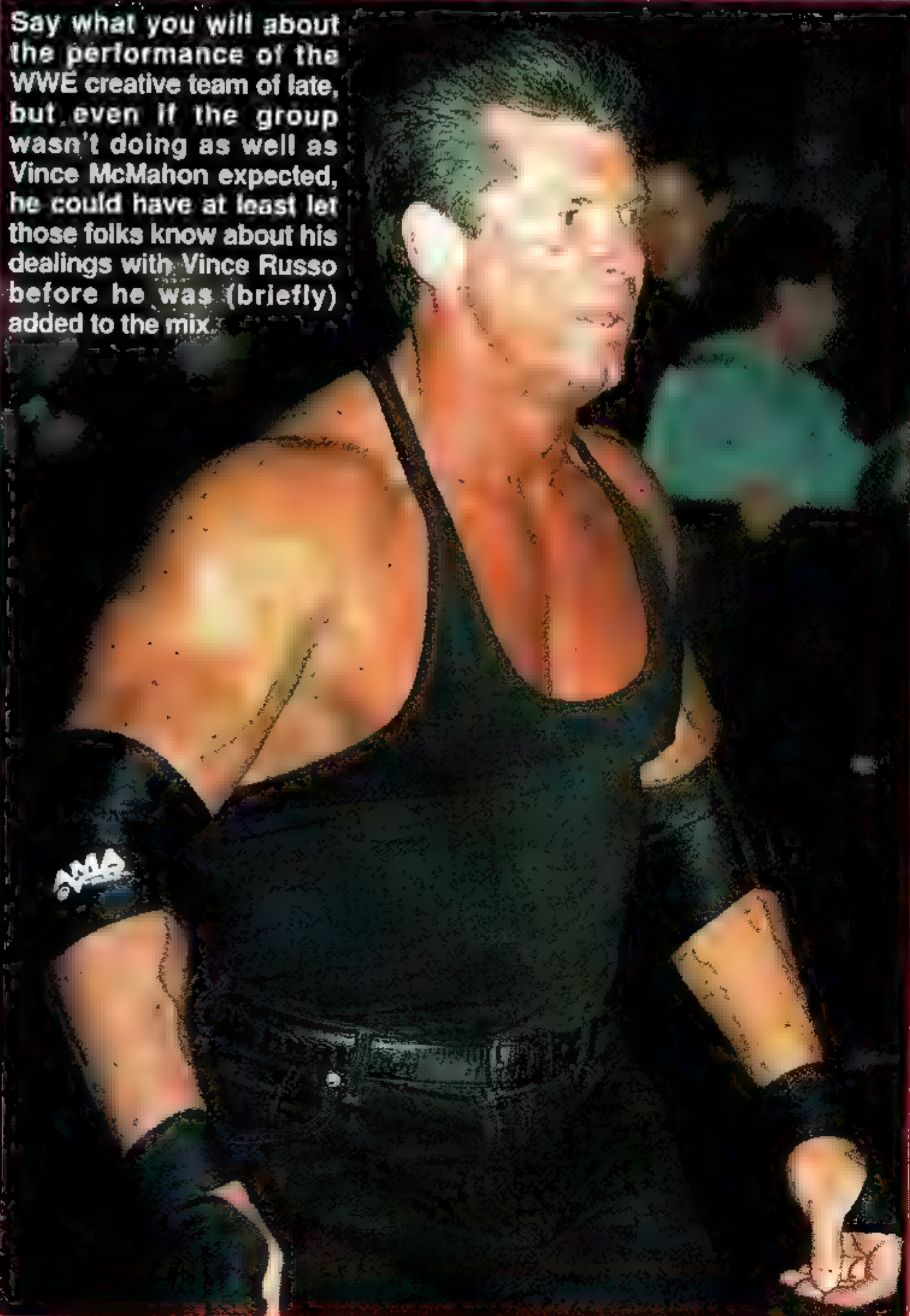
Within hours after the initial meeting, things

changed drastically. The creative team didn't like Russo's ideas at all—he was said to be horribly out of touch with WWE's current product—and he was demoted from creative director to creative consultant. A couple of weeks later, he left WWE (he never signed a deal) to take a creative position with NWA-TNA.

McMahon's biggest mistake wasn't hiring Russo. Under McMahon's guidance, Russo *could* have been successful again. No, McMahon's biggest mistake came when he didn't consult the other members of the creative team before making the move. His decision to suddenly bring in Russo must have had them wondering about their job security. After all, McMahon wouldn't have brought Russo back if he hadn't already lost some confidence in their abilities.

Maybe next time Vinnie Mac wants to shake things up with a big free-agent signing (wrestler or otherwise), he'll let some key people know about it beforehand. That way, he won't look so silly if it doesn't work out.

Say what you will about the performance of the WWE creative team of late, but even if the group wasn't doing as well as Vince McMahon expected, he could have at least let those folks know about his dealings with Vince Russo before he was (briefly) added to the mix.







## 2002 TURNBUCKLE TURKEY AWARDS

### HOWARD FINKEL

Who is Howard Finkel? We know that he's World Wrestling Entertainment's first-ever employee, and that he's been by the side of Vince McMahon ever since he took the company over from his father way back in 1982. We know that he's been the voice—or at least one of the voices—of WWE for decades.

But we also know that Howard Finkel is one of the slimiest, most depraved men under McMahon's employ right now. In recent months, we've seen a new Fink emerge, and he's a pretty twisted son of a gun. But, first, some background.

It's common knowledge that WWE likes its on-air personalities to be presentable. After Bell's palsy struck Jim Ross in late-1998, WWE officials were reluctant to return the Oklahoma native to the announcers' table. They were afraid that the sight of his partially paralyzed face would turn too many viewers off. It wasn't until they heard the fans pop for his appearance at WrestleMania XV, when he came out to call the main-event match between The Rock and Steve Austin, that WWE officials realized that J.R.'s looks didn't matter, and that the fans were more interested in his voice and his talent for calling matches so passionately. A couple of weeks later, WWE brought him back full-time, but not before we all learned a little something about its on-air hiring practices.

Those hiring practices probably had something to do with WWE's decision to hire Lillian Garcia in the late-1990s. She's beautiful and, being a marvelous singer, had a powerful and distinctive voice. What more could WWE ask for?

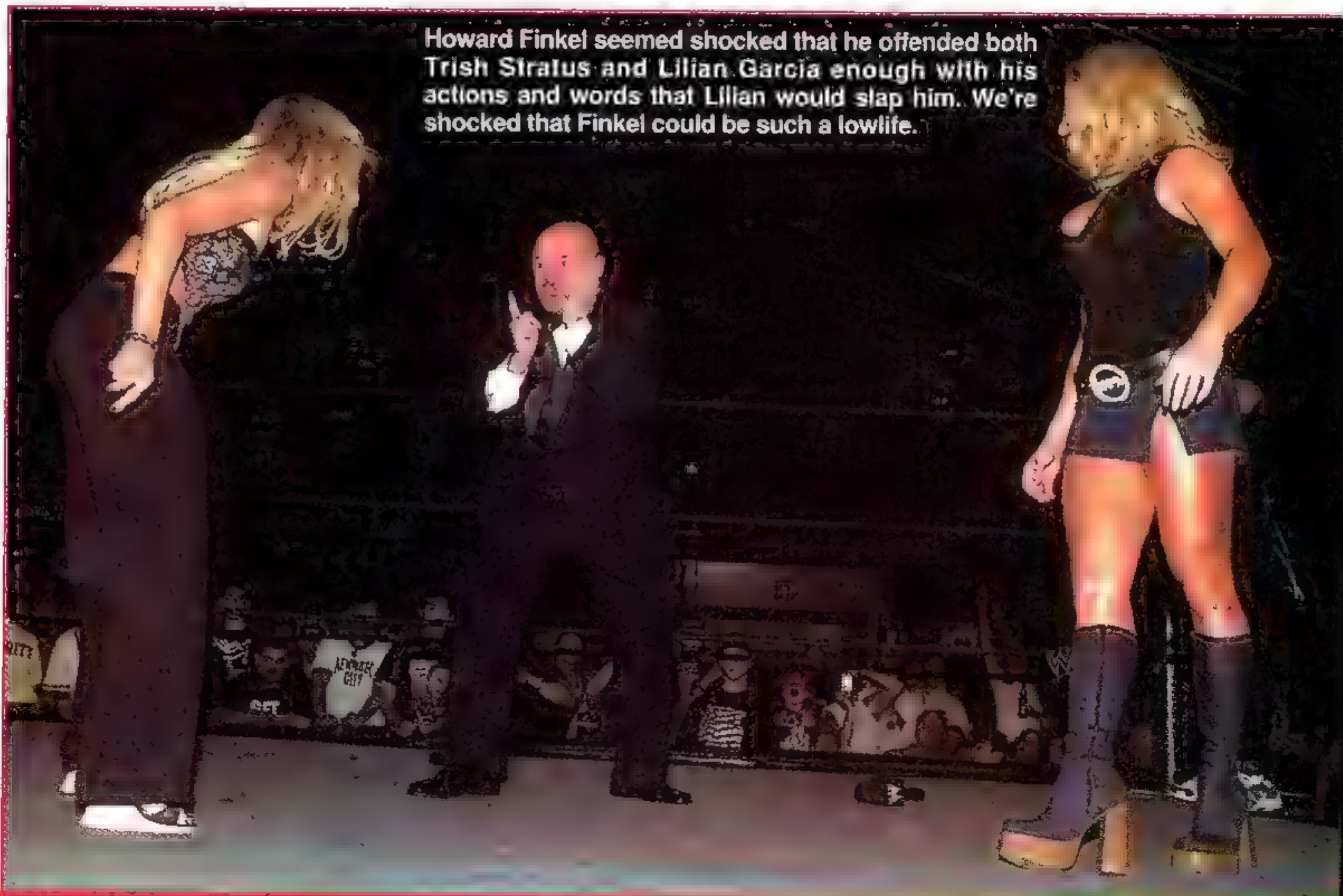
Month after month, "The Fink's" on-air role diminished, as the sexy and classy Garcia became the fans' number-one choice. In the summer of 2002, Finkel had finally had enough, and he let loose.

On the August 5 *Raw*, Finkel asked

new *Raw* General Manager Eric Bischoff for his job back as *Raw* ring announcer. Bischoff told Finkel he'd get a chance to compete for the position by going against Garcia in an announcer competition later in the evening. Not long into the competition, however, Bischoff, apparently bored, called on Rosie and Jamal to end it. Bischoff's three-minute men would have laid the smack down on both Finkel and Garcia, but "The Fink" threw Garcia to the hitmen and hightailed it out of the ring. He left Garcia in the ring as Rosie and Jamal destroyed her.

One week later, Finkel bragged about being the best announcer in WWE and said that he was sorry that Garcia wasn't roughed up sooner. Two weeks after that, after getting into several run-ins with Trish Stratus, Finkel wrestled Garcia in the first-ever (pray it was the *last* as well!) tuxedo/evening gown match for the right to become *Raw*'s full-time ring announcer. Before the match began, Stacy Keibler walked to the ring and told Fink she was there to make sure that Stratus didn't interfere with him during the match. Fink's reply to Keibler? "Right now, you're interfering with something in my trousers."

Fortunately, Garcia won the match. Unfortunately, that meant we had to watch a paunchy Howard stumble around the ring in nothing but a pair of red briefs for a few seconds. At least Finkel's reign of terror was over.



Howard Finkel seemed shocked that he offended both Trish Stratus and Lillian Garcia enough with his actions and words that Lillian would slap him. We're shocked that Finkel could be such a lowlife.





# HBK'S

## MIRACLE COMEBACK

WILL THE FANS LET HIM MAKE THE SMART CHOICE?

By Harry Burkett

**"T**HE WWF, TO this day, still thinks in the back of their minds, *Maybe he'll get the itch, maybe he'll do one more ...* But the itch will never come back. Once you make that decision and you believe in it and you know it's the right one, the itch is gone. For once, I wanted to use my head instead of my heart."





It may have been the most courageous performance by any wrestler this year, and maybe the most impressive of Michaels' outstanding career. He not only pounded Triple-H into defeat at SummerSlam (above), but he looked like his old self in doing so. But the fact that he left ringside on a stretcher should have told him something (below).

That was Shawn Michaels' comment, made during a "Press Conference" interview in the October 2000 issue of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, regarding his retirement due to serious back injuries. Except for a match in his fledgling Texas Wrestling Alliance, Michaels had not wrestled for more than four years. WWE officials, realizing "The Heartbreak Kid" was still very popular among the fans, always left open the option of a comeback ... even if Michaels himself did not.

It's a testament to Michaels' resolve that he did not wrestle in another WWE match until SummerSlam 2002—more than four years after he lost the World title to Steve Austin at WrestleMania XIV. For whatever reason, Michaels' itch for the business had come back.

And, boy, did he scratch it. Because Michaels' showdown with former best friend Triple-H at SummerSlam was advertised as a fight, not a wrestling match, we expected to see HBK—a shell of his former self physically—rely on brawling, blood, and cheap props to compensate for his lack of in-ring capability. After all, non-wrestlers such as Vince and Shane McMahon have used streetfights to hide their wrestling deficiencies. Terry Funk has used the hardcore style to extend his career by at least 10 years.

Even Shawn Michaels donned the blue jeans and cowboy boots when he beat Venom in a bunkhouse match for the TWA title in April 2000. He put forth a valiant effort, but he was by no means a showstopper.

Michaels intentionally lowered expectations for





SummerSlam. The TWA match, the fact that so many wrestlers hang on well past their prime, and the extent of Michaels' career-ending injuries had most fans thinking that HBK would be lucky just to throw a decent dropkick.

By 1998, after several years of consistently delivering some of the most spectacular matches ever witnessed in the WWF, "The Heartbreak Kid" realized his body was a wreck. His insistence on putting 100 percent effort into every match had mounted a terrible cost, in terms of his body and, of course, his potential for future earnings. He was forced to wear braces on both knees. He suffered from ongoing back problems, which were severely aggravated when he took a wicked spill during a casket match against The Undertaker in early-1998. One disk in his back was almost destroyed, and the one located directly below was nearly as badly damaged.

Michaels had good reason to believe that his WrestleMania match against Austin would be his last, although he still held out hope. Surgery would end his career for certain. He opted for a full year's rehabilitation instead. He herniated two higher disks while training. Halfway through the rehab, it was apparent that he wasn't making any progress—and was probably making matters worse.

He finally underwent surgery on January 12, 1999. Surgeons removed part of his hipbone, pulled out the most traumatized disk, and fused the bone graft between the two other disks. As a result, he lost five to 10 percent of the motion in his back and was unable to bend and touch his toes. Doctors told Michaels that if he took another bad spill, he could hit or cut a nerve, which could paralyze him from the waist down.

At age 33, Michaels had to accept the fact that his career was over.

Truth be known, Michaels probably never lost that wrestling itch. He became WWF commissioner in 1999. He was a celebrity spokesperson on behalf of the company. He made special appearances around the world. But it was the Shawn Michaels Wrestling Academy that kept him at the pulse of pro wrestling. There, along with trainer Rudy Boy Gonzalez, Michaels was able to mold future superstars, just as Jose Lothario and others had done for him.

Of course, Michaels wasn't supposed to exert himself while training his students. The stories of Michaels' inability to resist jumping into the ring have become legendary. According to one account, a student had a fear of flipping backward to deliver a moonsault off the top rope. Michaels grew impatient and said, "Okay, kid, let me show you how it's done." HBK climbed to the top turnbuckle and came off with a textbook moonsault. There was only one problem. The shock of hitting the canvas wreaked havoc with his nerves, causing his arm to twitch involuntarily.

So how did Michaels deliver such a magnificent



Almost everyone expected a bloody brawl from HBK and Triple-H, and that is what we got. We also got a wonderful wrestling performance by a man who didn't look like he'd competed in only one match in the previous four-plus years!

performance at SummerSlam? Time, rest, and appropriate training can provide amazing recuperative powers. It had been four years since Michaels had been in a PPV-level match and nearly a year since he had taken a hands-on role at the training school.

Michaels surprised the crowd in Uniondale, New York, by leapfrogging Helmsley early in the match and throwing him over the top rope and to the arena floor. He followed that with a plancha onto "The Game" at ringside.

Yet Michaels' previous injuries had a psychological effect on the fans at the Nassau Coliseum. They winced and grimaced, and



Just getting caught on the top turnbuckle—something that happens to wrestlers all the time—must have scared Michaels a bit. If he fell awkwardly on his back from that position, it could have been disastrous.



## MORE THAN HBK'S CAREER IS BORN AGAIN!

In the prime of life, injuries forced Shawn Michaels to trade his celebrity lifestyle—performing in front of thousands on a nightly basis and earning a rock star's salary—for a subdued life in San Antonio. He would probably never achieve the same level of fame again. Some superstars wouldn't be able to cope with that tradeoff on an emotional level. Michaels was determined to make his life even better.

He was already blessed with a lovely wife, Rebecca (formerly Whisper of the *Nitro* Girls), and looked forward to raising his son, Cameron. Some introspection led to genuine soul-searching and, ultimately, his decision to become a born-again Christian.

Michaels' conversion was made easier by the fact that many former wrestlers have already taken that step. During the last few years, Ted DiBiase has been instrumental in uniting Christian wrestlers, including Tully Blanchard, Nikita Koloff, and Sting. Several ex-wrestlers recently attended a Christian conference in Phoenix, Arizona, where Michaels said everything came together for him.

In an interview posted on [milliondollarman.com](http://milliondollarman.com), Michaels said, "What really helped me was to be in an environment where there are a hundred guys—the kind of men you play sports with, you hang around with, you train with—all in there not caring about anything but worshipping God. And it moved me beyond words."

Critics charge that Michaels is hypocritical because his religious beliefs are in conflict with his current career in WWE. Michaels admits

that some storylines cause him discomfort and that he will no longer curse in the ring or use the old DX crotch chop, but he believes his in-ring comeback doesn't compromise his faith.

"The day after Kevin Nash got hurt, I was on a plane and in a very deep prayer session with the Lord," explained Michaels in the same interview. "And, all of a sudden, this idea popped into my head ... It was an idea for a storyline and it was about me and Vince, and me ending up wrestling Vince on a PPV."



No more of this from HBK!

After much prayer and thought, Michaels presented the idea to the WWE chairman. McMahon suggested Triple-H as his opponent instead, and plans for HBK's wrestling comeback were underway.

Michaels said he has enjoyed discussing his faith with other Christians such as Hulk Hogan, Eddie Guerrero, and Chris Jericho. "There has been an effect in the dressing room, but I haven't really done anything. It says in the Bible the strongest witness is a silent witness that just lives his life by the word of God and sets an example."

—Harry Burkett

were reduced to hushed silence as Triple-H tortured Michaels with the most basic of moves. It had been at least 20 years since the over-the-knee backbreaker, a whip to the turnbuckles, and the abdominal stretch had roused such a concerned reaction from WWE fans.

Incredibly, Michaels rebounded in such a manner that took fans back to his heyday in the mid-1990s. He superkicked a steel chair into Helmsley's face, took flight from a ladder in the ring, and dove from the top turnbuckle and onto an outstretched Triple-H

and through a table. In the end, he flipped out of a pedigree, bridged Triple-H into a pinning position (which looked painful in itself), and scored the fall. The look of ecstasy on Michaels' face at SummerSlam was matched only by his reaction to winning the WWF World title from Bret Hart in 1996.

Now comes the hard part. Michaels was able to endure a four-year hiatus because he was convinced that he could no longer perform in the ring at his previous level. Now that his SummerSlam effort with Triple-H is being hailed as a Match of the Year candidate, that might no longer hold true. HBK proved he could still be a showstopper.

The reality is, however, that it took four years of rest and rehabilitation to squeeze out a 26-minute match. And, while Triple-H's postmatch sledgehammer attack marred HBK's victory, the match itself did not result in further injuries. It caused Michaels to thirst for more. Helmsley's attack simply gives him an excuse.

There was another reason why Michaels was able to endure retirement. Fans did not inundate Michaels or the WWF with petitions, Web site campaigns, or "HBK Come Back" signs on television. The extent of Michaels' injuries was well-known. They had watched Michaels literally break his back for them for more than a decade. The wrestling world didn't have the audacity, or the ruthlessness, to clamor for a "Heartbreak Kid" comeback.

SummerSlam changed all that. Some fans believe Michaels' condition must not have been that severe after all, or, if he had suffered injuries, he must have had time to recuperate. And Michaels, who has never



Michaels might be able to get through one more grudge match with "The Game," even one as brutal and spectacular as the classic they had at SummerSlam (above and opposite page). But one more could easily lead to one more after that and one more after that ...





been able to get rid of that itch, is more than willing to scratch it with the fans' encouragement—although he denies this is the case.

"I have no illusions about what my body can and can't do," insisted Michaels. "My negotiations with WWE for one more match have been going on for a while now and, since it took that long, I think it's pos-

sible to manage at least two during the same year. Trust me, I'm as realistic about this as anybody."

Fans have always admired Michaels for his tremendous heart inside the ring. But, as fans cheer his comeback matches, Michaels will begin making decisions with that heart instead of his head. He had better be smart enough to know the difference. □



**On the Cusp of Superstardom (Still!!)  
What Will It Take To Push Him Over The**

# EDGE

It was the same old same old for Edge at SummerSlam. Another terrific pay-per-view match. Another solid win (over Eddie Guerrero). And at least another month stuck in the mid-card. The same old same old in Edge's case isn't horrible, but haven't we been talking about him as a potential new main-eventer... forever?



By Dan Murphy

**O**N PAPER, EDGE is one of the top wrestlers in WWE. Also on paper, the St. Louis Rams were a *much* better team than the New England Patriots, the team to which they lost in last season's Super Bowl. And also on paper, the New York Mets were one of the National League's better teams entering the 2002 season. They were so inept by the end of the year that they couldn't win a single baseball game at home in August.

The point is an obvious one: It doesn't matter how good or bad a team or athlete looks "on paper." Actual performance is all that counts. But let's take a brief look at Edge's resume anyway:

The 2001 King of the Ring winner is a four-time Intercontinental champion, a former WCW U.S. champion, and an eight-time WWE World tag team champion. During the first eight months of 2002, he scored exciting high-profile wins over recent world champions Kurt Angle and Chris Jericho and established himself as



Edge just keeps better and better as a wrestler as he continues to gain experience against some of WWE's best ring generals, including Guerrero. It's hard to believe he hasn't gotten even one chance to wrestle for a world title on a pay-per-view.

arguably the top full-time fan favorite on *Smackdown* in the absence of The Rock and Hulk Hogan. He even teamed with Hogan and helped the "Hulkster" win his first-ever WWE tag title.

So much for all that paper, because Edge still hasn't broken through to the top level of WWE talent.

After winning last year's King of the Ring tournament, Edge briefly feuded with former KOTR winner Billy Gunn. Edge pointed out that superstars such as Steve Austin and Triple-H used their King of the Ring victories as steppingstones to the WWF World title. He grouped Gunn with King Mabel as the two biggest KOTR busts ... the guys who won the tourney but never came close to matching, let alone topping, that success. Despite all of his success in the past year, despite the fact that he has a much bigger upside than Gunn ever had, Edge is still stuck on that loosely defined upper mid-card level.

Why doesn't he get world title shots? Why is he usually paired with the likes of Rey Misterio Jr. and John Cena rather than The Undertaker and Brock Lesnar?

"I think a large part of the reason why Edge has remained in the mid-card despite such a consistently excellent year in the ring is because the fans just haven't totally rallied around him," said WWE analyst Thomas Pilliard. "He recently has started calling his fans Edgeheads, and as silly as it might sound, that's a step in the right direction, because it brings his core fans together in a type of community. Now Edge really needs to establish an identity to rally fans around.

"As a heel, Edge had a lot of freedom to cut some very entertaining promos, as well as to bail out of the ring if he was in a difficult situation. He wasn't afraid to run away if he had to," Pilliard continued. "As a fan favorite, Edge is trying too hard to take the high road. He's trying to fight the good fight and prove worthy of the fans' respect. Ironically, in doing so, he's burying some of the most entertaining—and marketable—aspects of his personality."

In a sentence, Edge is a better heel than he is a fan favorite. At least right now. That was the case with fellow sub-230-pound wrestlers Jericho and Shawn Michaels as well. Both Y2J and HBK quickly learned the only way they were going to get respect was if they went out and grabbed it by any means necessary. That approach ultimately took both men to the top of WWE. Could it work for Edge?

*Smackdown* color commentator Tazz has his own theory about what Edge must do to take the next step in his career.

"Edge needs a little more follow-up, both in his matches and after his matches," Tazz said. "I've





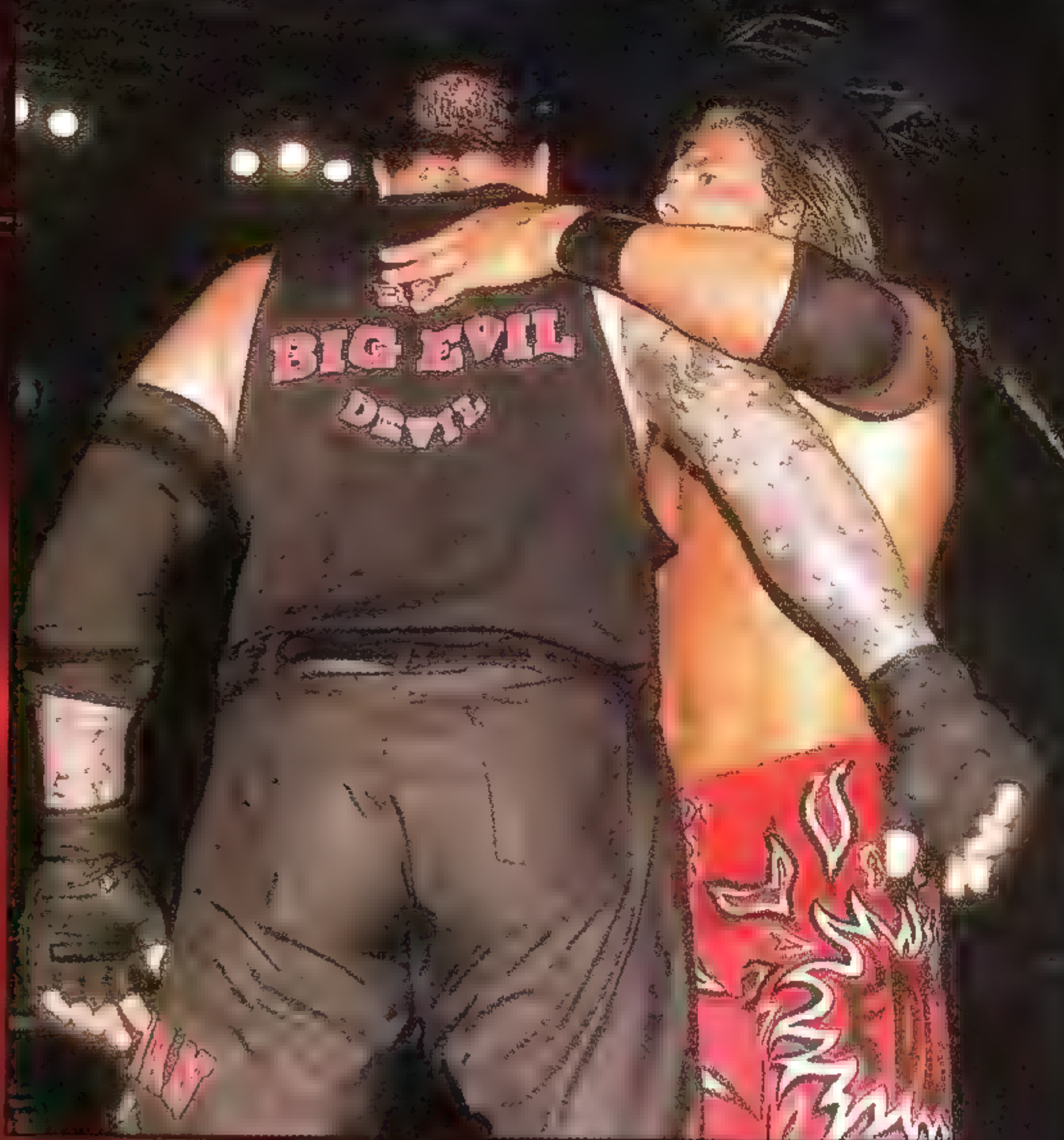
To be fair to Edge, he has wrestled a few matches with The Undertaker as his partner, and he sure looked like he belonged in the ring with him. He might be better off if he got more aggressive and attacked UT. Maybe he needs a strong run as a heel in the singles ranks right now.

seen Edge hit an Edge-a-cution and wait a few seconds before following that with a cover or stringing together another move. Maybe he still hasn't quite rid himself of that tag team mentality where you have to balance whether you should try to capitalize on a big move or whether it would be better to make the tag to get the fresh guy in. I'd also like to see him expand his repertoire a little and throw in some fundamental wear-down holds and submission holds, like Angle does, just to keep his opponents off-guard.

"As far as after the match goes, Edge could use a little career guidance," Tazz said. "His hair vs. hair win over Angle was the biggest win of his life, and he didn't do enough to follow up on that. He should have lobbied for a title shot or gone out of his way to start a new feud on an even higher level. Instead, he didn't capitalize on all the momentum from that win."

William Regal, a man who feuded with Edge over the I-C title (and got the best of him in the end), also weighed in on the subject.

"There's a perfectly good reason why you'll



never see Edge do as well as I have done, and that's because he's simply not assertive enough," he said. "He doesn't have the hunger to win. He's perfectly content to react to whatever situation comes his way. When that fool broke my nose, I told him I was going to come back and defeat him. I had a fire in my belly, and that's why I won. Edge has never had that passion. Until he does, he'll never be more than a bloody long-haired bloke who's more concerned with his good looks than championship belts."

Despite those criticisms, Edge remains in a good position to make his run at the *Smackdown* title, provided Undertaker doesn't take Lesnar's gold strap before Edge gets his shot. If Edge can get a *Smackdown* title shot, he would have to be at the top of his game to pull off an upset victory. He would have to use some of the heel tactics he used alongside Christian to overcome Lesnar's size advantage.

No matter how big, strong, and intimidating Lesnar is, a well-executed *con-chair-to* on the ring-side steps could stop him in his tracks. Edge would also need a solid game plan, and he'd have to execute that plan flawlessly, or close to it.

With the right preparation, Edge could pull off a win over Lesnar ... or even Undertaker. If he did, you can bet the fans would get behind him more than they ever have. But he needs to show that "fire in his belly," he needs to get that title match made, and he needs to win it. If not, King Edge might join Kings Billy and Mabel in the flash-in-the-pan club. □



Edge was on the cusp of superstardom after he ended his partnership with Christian (above) and we thought he was really on the cusp after a feud with William Regal (left). Yet he battled Regal early in 2002 and he's still on the cusp.



**hotseat**

## ROB VAN DAM

**"I CAN'T HELP BUT BE WWE'S BEST ALL-AROUND WRESTLER"**

**A**S A WWE superstar, Rob Van Dam no longer turns in 30-plus-minute matches several times per week. He's also toned down **some** of the hardcore antics that characterized his tenure in ECW. But as legions of RVD's boosters will testify, time and programming restrictions haven't hurt his ability to thrill fans or win critical matches.

In fact, since the WWE brand extension, RVD's star has risen steadily. **Raw** General Manager Eric Bischoff considers him one of his hottest and most valuable stars and has put him in numerous main-event matches on that program. And why not? Fan reaction alone suggests that people want to see Van Dam in the mix with the company's biggest stars.

He took several very important steps in early-September, as he pinned newly crowned **Raw** champion Triple-H in a tag team match on September 7, then just seven nights later won a four-way elimination match to earn a shot at "The Game's" gold at Unforgiven.

No, RVD is not the most electrifying interview, but his accomplishments speak for themselves. They speak very loudly. And anyone who knows RVD knows that's how he prefers things. So listen up: Van Dam defeated Jeff Hardy to unify his Intercontinental title with Hardy's European belt on July 22, and just one night after regaining the I-C title from Chris Benoit at SummerSlam, he beat Tommy Dreamer to unify that championship with Dreamer's hardcore title.

While a steady run on the top of the card and a world championship

had still eluded Van Dam as of press time, he set out to change that by injecting himself into the feud with Triple-H. With or without a world title, many fans and pundits believe Van Dam is the most exciting wrestler on the planet. The editorial staff at London Publishing selected RVD as the number-one wrestler in our 2002 "PWI 500" ranking this past August.

No doubt, all the accolades are bound to fortify Van Dam's legendary self-confidence. As usual, the superstar sounded remarkably well-grounded (not!) when Senior Writer Frank

**"If I were in charge of Raw or Smackdown, I'd be busting my ass to get Rob Van Dam in the main event, too. Is it any wonder Raw is still the most popular brand out there? With me in the lineup and taking on a guy like Triple-H, I'd say not."**

Krewda spoke with him about wrestling in WWE, the fans, his number-one ranking, and the path to his first world title.

**Q:** So, Rob, how does it feel to be finally getting your chance to be the star on **Raw** and wrestle for Triple-H's title? He looked a little worried once he saw that you won the elimination match to earn a title shot at Unforgiven.

**A:** I guess the courteous thing to say would be that I'm really flat-

tered to be getting my chance. But the truth is I'm not the least bit surprised. If I were in charge of **Raw** or **Smackdown**, I'd be busting my ass to get Rob Van Dam in the main event, too. Is it any wonder **Raw** is still the most popular brand out there? With me in the lineup and taking on a guy like Triple-H, I'd say not.

**Q:** Neither would I. Anyone with eyes and the least bit of knowledge about wrestling can recognize your talent. However, there are plenty of talented wrestlers in WWE. What distinguishes you from the rest?

**A:** Ask the fans what they think. It might be that I can wrestle harder, longer, and with more entertainment value than any other man on the planet. That's what it's all about for me.

**Q:** Well, as outrageous as that sounds, I can't really argue with you. Yet I'm sure some fans would point to Brock Lesnar or Triple-H and say those guys are world champs. They're the ones Bischoff and Stephanie should be getting behind, not RVD.

**A:** That's for them to decide. But one of the best lessons I learned in ECW was that while winning a world title is great, it's not the be-all and end-all. Being the TV champ there for two years taught me that the real thrill is in the journey, the anticipation of becoming champion. Right now, my fans seem to be enjoying the ride, and





***"I've always said the thing that really drives my engine is the chance to give the fans their money's worth. I want every fan, whether they're seeing me for the first or the 50th time, to leave the arena talking about what Rob Van Dam did that night."***

that's pretty cool.

**Q:** Which do you find more important?

**A:** Giving the people what they want, most definitely. I've always said the thing that really drives my engine is the chance to give the fans their money's worth. I want every fan, whether they're seeing me for the first time or the 50th time, to leave the arena talking about what Rob Van Dam did that night. If the title belts come, and they will, great.

**Q:** That sounds like noble enough motivation. But don't you feel winning a world title would give you a bigger platform from which to impress the fans? After all, you only get so much exposure wrestling on the undercard.

**A:** Of course. But look, the way things have gone, you could say I'm already the I-C, European, and hardcore champion. As long as I keep giving the



Although submission-style wrestling isn't Rob Van Dam's forte, he did very well in a match that featured a lot of mat grappling and submission holds at SummerSlam. He beat Chris Benoit cleanly that night to regain the I-C belt.

fans what they've come to expect from RVD, I'll add Triple-H's World title to my collection soon enough.

**Q:** You make it sound so simple. But you don't seem to show much regard for the talents of Lesnar, Rock, Benoit, and Triple-H. These are men you'll have to beat to become a world champ. You're talking about them almost as if defeating them was an afterthought.

**A:** I think those guys are all great wrestlers, and I respect them. But when you're RVD, sometimes defeating your opponents *is* an afterthought. Besides, I've wrestled all of them and more than held my own. I have no reason to fear these guys or anyone else in WWE. Unless you've been living under a rock for the last 18 months, everyone knows RVD is the man to beat.

**Q:** Well, like I said earlier, Triple-H definitely seemed concerned about wrestling you, and I think you gave Lesnar a tougher time than anyone else in WWE has so far, but if

I remember correctly, Brock dished out quite a bit of punishment in those matches.

**A:** Yes he did. But I took it all and came back. You know, it takes more than muscle, more than toughness, and more than smarts to keep Rob Van Dam down. Sure, Lesnar and Paul Heyman had their moments, but nobody runs over me. That's why if something happens with the brand extension thing and I face him one-on-one again, I'll be taking his title, too.

**Q:** There's that old cockiness coming through again. Does it ever cross your mind that such bragging will make you a target of the other WWE superstars?

**A:** First of all, it's not bragging when you can back it up. And everyone in WWE knows that Rob Van Dam can back up his words with action. That's why I'm already a target. But what can I do? I can't help but be WWE's best all-around wrestler. It wouldn't be fair to the people who come out to see our shows.

**Q:** Speaking of the fans, how hard has it been to make an impression on them in WWE as compared to ECW, where you had longer matches in which to showcase your abilities?

**A:** For some guys making the jump, I imagine that would be an enormous problem. But you have to remember, I'm Rob Van Dam. I was getting fans to chant "R-V-D!" from my very first match here. I loved having 30 to 40 minutes





A great performance and victory over Benoit at SummerSlam (above and below) were critical to RVD. They allowed him to move forward in the ensuing weeks and focus on Triple-H and his new *Raw* title, and he looks like he's more than ready to be the man for the *Raw* brand.



to work with in ECW. To me, wrestling shorter matches means making quicker work of my opponents. I think I've shown that I was more than ready for those challenges.

**Q:** Eddie Guerrero, for one, might disagree. You guys had an excellent ladder match on *Raw* several months ago. The winner of that

was hardly a forgone conclusion. Eddie gave you all you could handle.

**A:** Yes he did. Eddie Guerrero is another excellent athlete who also has roots in ECW. I don't have a bad thing to say about him. But he wasn't around for the RVD era. If he had been, I wouldn't have had to give him a hardcore history lesson that night. Same thing with Chris Benoit. He is without a doubt one of the nastiest men to ever climb into a ring. But he just isn't Rob Van Dam. Nobody is.

**Q:** What about The Undertaker? Things didn't go quite as planned in your World title bid against him.

**A:** Of course they didn't. I didn't expect Ric Flair to come running down the aisle and reverse the decision after I pinned The Undertaker, and everybody saw what Flair did to me. So I have nothing to be ashamed about. You might wonder why I never made such a big fuss about it, but it's not my style. I knew another title would roll around soon enough.



***"The way things have gone, you could say I'm already the I-C, European, and hardcore champion. As long as I keep giving the fans what they've come to expect from RVD, I'll add Triple-H's World title to my collection soon enough."***

**Q:** Actually, I was wondering more about why you came out and rescued Ric Flair on Labor Day and saved him from a beating at Triple-H's hands, then teamed with him in a tag team main event later in the evening. I figured the last person you'd want to save from a beating was Flair.

**A:** Believe me, it had nothing to do with saving Flair's ass. I just realized that I wouldn't get to the main event by wrestling Jeff Hardy and Tommy Dreamer in hardcore matches all year. And we all know RVD belongs in the main event.

**Q:** I'd agree. And congratulations, by the way, on being number one in this year's "PWI 500."

**A:** Thank you very much. I will be PC here and say I'm flattered, because I really am. But when you look at RVD and the other 499 wrestlers, could there have been any other choice? □



In Toms River, New Jersey, 12 of the top teams in the sport honored a lost friend the best way they knew how ... by putting on one of the most exciting tournaments—and shows—of the year

Photos by Timothy A. Walker

## TAG TEAM TOURNAMENT

"A time for healing, a time for celebration."

By Dan Murphy

**N**OT TOO LONG ago, Russ and Charlie Haas were considered the next big thing in tag team wrestling.

Their fluid teamwork, crisp execution, tireless work ethic, and technical excellence had some folks comparing them to such classic tandems as The Midnight Express and British Bulldogs. The Haas brothers, once they were finally called up to the main WWE roster, were going to revitalize the art of tag team wrestling.

Then, on December 14, 2001, tragedy struck. Russ' heart gave out. He died in his sleep at his apartment in Cincinnati, not far from the home base of the Heartland Wrestling Association, which was then a WWE developmental territory. He was just 27 years old and left behind a grieving wife, brother Charlie, two sisters, and his parents.

A short time after Russ' death, Phoenix Championship Wrestling (a New Jersey-based organization) promoter Donnie B offered his condolences to Charlie. He also wanted to come up with a way to honor Russ' memory.

"I wanted to do something special to both remember Russ and to honor tag team wrestling, since tag team wrestling was so important to the brothers," Donnie said. "I thought of the tag team tourney and likened it to the old NWA Crockett Cup."

Once Charlie gave the idea his blessing, Donnie began making plans for the Russ Haas Memorial Tag Team Tournament. Proceeds of the show would go to Russ' widow, Deedra.

Donnie initially envisioned a two-day tournament featuring 16 of the top independent teams in the United States, but the concept seemed too cumbersome. He narrowed the field to 12 teams.

On June 29, PCW sent out feelers to teams from around the country. Within a few weeks, more than 70 had contacted Donnie and asked to be part of the show. The matchmakers whittled down the field and the lucky dozen were announced. The teams were: Chris Divine and Quiet Storm; Malice and Seven; Pete Gas and Bo Dupp; Steve Bradley and Lance



Nova and Charlie "R.C." Haas (shown with PCW's Joe Gunns and promoter Donnie B, above) weren't a team at the outset of the Russ Haas tourney, but that didn't stop them from somehow emerging as the winners at the end. It was a fine way for all involved to honor Russ and the great team that he and Charlie were in the ring (opposite page).





Matt Vandal showed a lot of heart in the three-way match in the heart bracket, and he showed a lot of strength against one of his opponents, OVW's Nick Dinsmore, but it was The United Nations—Tiger Khan and Prophet—that advanced to the semifinals.

and fellow Phoenix Championship Wrestling officials Joe Miggs and Mark Melacchio started drawing up various brackets and working out permutations when Donnie had an epiphany.



Charlie Haas was a little too strong in the strength bracket for Mafia of Da Hit Squad. He had a strong partner in the form of Jamal, too... just not for very long.

Cade; The Ballard Brothers; "The Machine" Doug Basham and Damaja; Christian York and Joey Matthews; The Amazing Red and Striker; The S.A.T.; Da Hit Squad; The Island Boys (Rosie and Jamal); and The United Nations. The teams represented some of the very best from numerous promotions, including WWE, NWA-TNA, Ohio Valley Wrestling, PCW, the HWA, UPW, and the ECWA.

Having 12 teams involved made bracketing a logistical nightmare. Donnie

"I was reading the sheet of paper and the heading at the top said HAAS CUP," he said. "The letters just stood out to me. I looked at those letters and said to myself, 'What do these letters mean outside the word Haas, and how can we connect them to the show?' That's when I thought we could have each letter represent an aspect of tag team wrestling. 'H' stood for heart, 'A' stood for agility, 'A' stood

for ability, and 'S' stood for strength."

To shake things up further, three teams were placed in each category making the first-round matches three-way elimination contests. The tournament was set for August 31 in Toms River, New Jersey. However, injuries and no-shows forced matchmakers to scramble and rework the brackets on the fly.

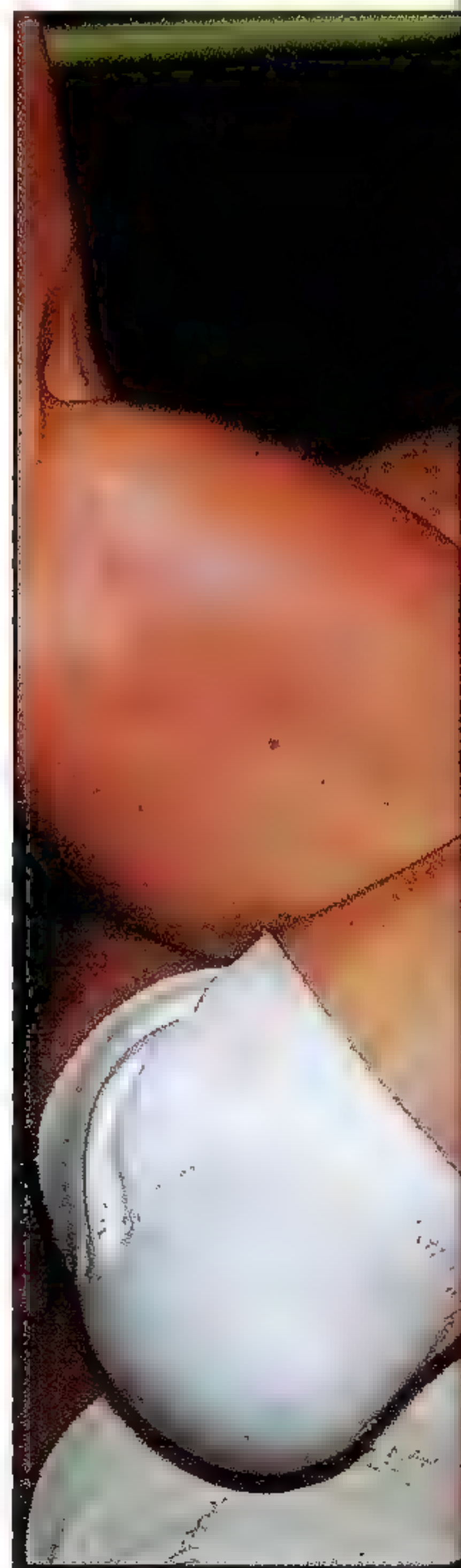
In the opening contest, Red and Striker advanced over The S.A.T. and Divine Storm in the agility bracket, but Striker suffered a leg injury and was unable to continue, leaving Red without a partner. Rosie of The Island Boys also was unable to compete due to a hip flexor and was replaced by Charlie Haas. Haas and Jamal advanced by eliminating Malice and Seven and Da Hit Squad in the strength bracket.

In the ability bracket, OVW's Damaja and Basham advanced over York and Matthews and the Ballards. PCW tag champs The United Nations (Tiger Khan and Prophet) advanced over Dupp and Matt Vandal (subbing for Pete Gas) and Lance Cade and Nick Dinsmore (subbing for Bradley) in the heart bracket.

Red surprised the crowd by introducing "King Of Old School" Steve Corino as his tag team partner for the semifinals, but even he couldn't stop Damaja and Basham from prevailing and qualifying for the finals.

In the other semifinal match, Haas and Jamal defeated The United Nations. But before the new team could celebrate their victory, Rosie made his way to ringside. Rosie admonished his Jamal for teaming with Haas (their toughest rival in the WWE developmental system), and The Island Boys proceeded to demolish Haas with a brutal three-minute-style beatdown. That's when OVW champion Nova hit the ring to make the save and offer to wrestle alongside Haas in the tournament finals.

In those finals, Haas and Nova—the team that wasn't in anyone's brackets—came out on top by defeating Damaja and Basham in an exciting and emotional contest. After the match, WWE representative Tom Prichard and ECWA promoter Jim





Kettner (a mentor to the Haases) joined Russ and Charlie's father, Chuck, and sister Cara, Russ' widow, Deedra, and Donnie B to present the Haas Cup to Charlie and Nova.

"This was one hell of a show," Prichard said in a brief speech as he presented the Cup to Nova and Haas. "These boys should be proud of what they did here tonight. It is an honor to present them with this Cup."

"This was the best show PCW has ever done, and we look forward to doing it year after year," Donnie B said later. "Our hope is to build this tourney and make it the equivalent of the ECWA's Super 8. I think we had a good start."

Despite their actions earlier in the evening, even Rosie and Jamal were happy with the outcome of the tournament.

"Russ' death has been hard on everyone who

Steve Corino didn't get involved in the tournament until the semifinal round, and he might have wished he hadn't once he ran into Damaja (right). PCW regular Khan gave Haas all he could handle in the semis (above), but not as much as Rosie and Jamal gave him right after Jamal and Haas advanced to the finals.

ever had the opportunity to know him," Rosie said. "Tonight was a time for healing, and it was a time for celebration."

"Besides," he said with a smile, "maybe next year Jamal and I will take the Cup ourselves."



For Charlie, the tournament honoring his brother's memory was just another small step in what has been a difficult healing process over the past year.

Photo by Scott Rowlett



# will Chuck & be ruined by sweet success?

By Dan Murphy

**F**OR ONE WEEK in mid-September, Billy Gunn and Chuck Palumbo can say they were A-List celebrities.

Their heavily hyped *Smackdown* "nuptials" touched off a feeding frenzy with the mainstream media. Billy and Chuck—yes, *Billy and Chuck*—appeared on NBC's *Today Show* and on Howard Stern's radio show on the same morning. They were featured in news stories in the *Washington Post*, on the E! cable network, and on National Public Radio. The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) even sent them a gravy boat from Pottery Barn as a wedding gift.

Billy and Chuck were getting more mainstream press than The Rock!

Who could have predicted this goofy storyline would have touched off serious debates

**A whirlwind media tour, a main-event slot on *Smackdown*, and the most talked-about angle of the year. Chuck and Billy had it all in the span of a week. Unfortunately, it just might be the worst thing that ever happened to them.**

Photos by Gary Dineen/Winning Image





Chuck and Billy were the dominant team in WWE during the first half of 2002. Then their fortunes took a turn for the worse. Just because they were all over the news for a week because of the wedding doesn't mean they're guaranteed to become big, big stars.



about the sociological ramifications and cultural significance of a gay wedding on a prime time wrestling program!

Certainly not Gunn and Palumbo. As far as they were concerned, this whole thing was a publicity stunt designed to help them overcome a minor losing streak. They weren't going to go through with it. They were just trying to rile up the fans a little bit and push the envelope on the homosexual routine to position themselves for better matches. Next thing they knew, they were national spokesmen for the gay rights movement, fully endorsed by GLAAD and other activist groups.

Except neither Billy nor Chuck is really gay. We knew that all along, but now they're not even gay within the confines of the wrestling shows. As crazy as it may seem, their plan to get more heel heat has turned them into fan favorites ... at least with some segments of the audience.

But what happens now? Can Chuck and Billy make the transition to full-fledged fan favorites, or will they receive a nasty backlash when the mainstream media realizes the gay wedding was just a silly ratings ploy? Will fans be able to embrace the Chuck and Billy characters as popular campy characters, like they have with Goldust? And is there any way Gunn and Palumbo will be able to live down this gimmick and advance their careers, or will they be crushed under the weight of the commitment ceremony angle?

Can you believe we're asking these questions?

"This whole storyline was really a mixed bag for these guys," said INSIDE WRESTLING Editor-in-Chief Dave Lenker. "I never thought in a million years we'd see Chuck Palumbo and Billy Gunn on Howard Stern's show, let alone the *Today Show*. These guys got the biggest exposure of their career, but it really may have pigeonholed them into those roles. If they get typecast as the 'ambiguously gay Chuck and Billy,' they can pretty much kiss goodbye any singles title aspirations they have."

Wrestling fans can be notoriously unforgiving when a wrestler tries to escape a lousy or limiting gimmick. He may be a former ECW World champion, yet to this day, Justin Credible still gets "Aldo" chants, a constant reminder of his failed run as "Portuguese Man O'War" Aldo Montoya. Ed "Brutus Beefcake" Leslie and John "Earthquake" Tenta tried new gimmick after new gimmick but were never able to overcome stigmas attached to their previous personae. Dustin "Goldust" Rhodes even went so far as to burn his Goldust tights on TV, and he still wasn't able to put the character behind him. If not for his hilarious interplay with Booker T, his career might be over. And how about Terry Taylor? He might as well put "Red Rooster" on his tombstone. Chuck and Billy have plenty of work to do if they ever want the fans to take them seriously from here on.

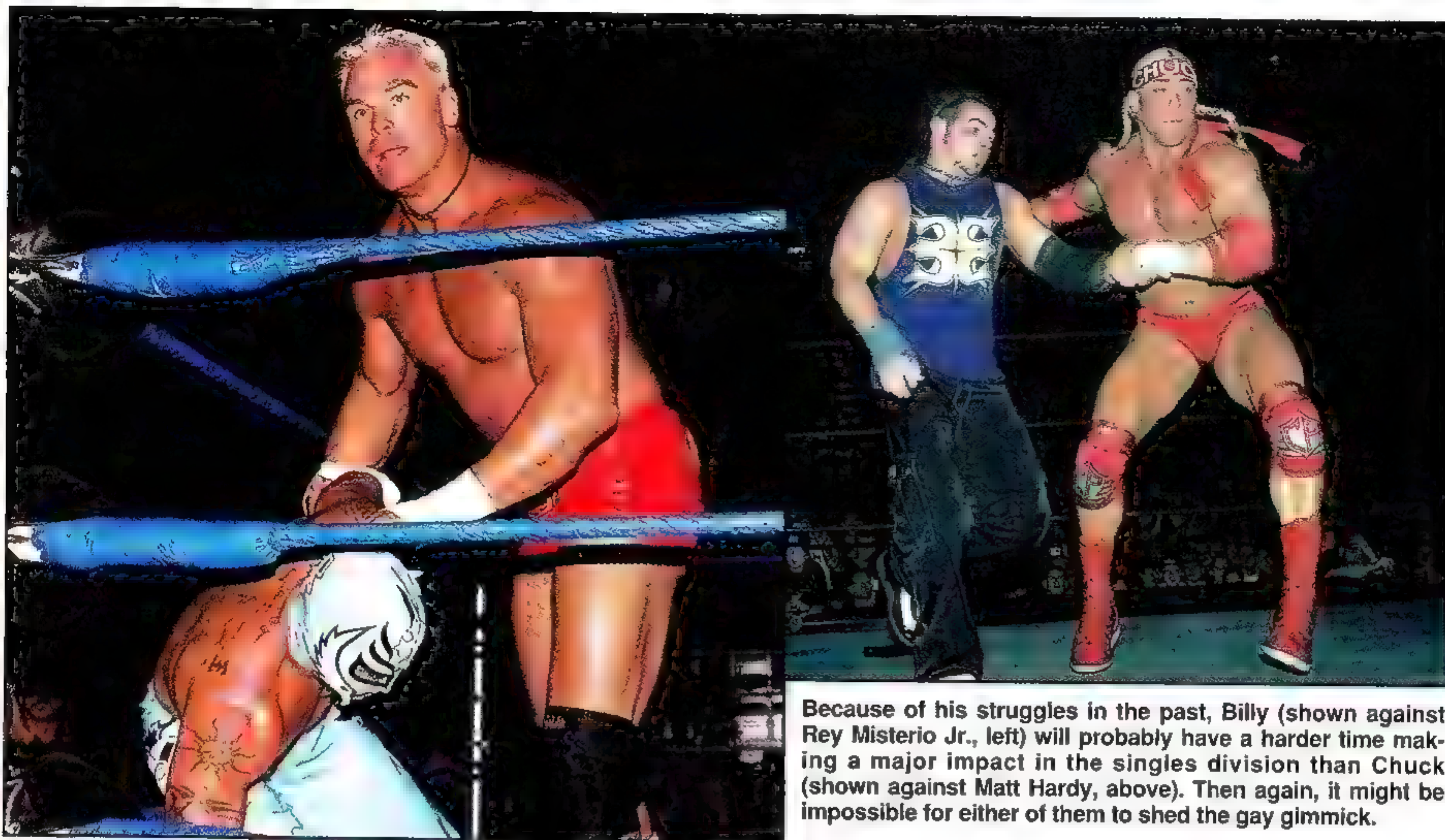
Making matters worse is that they are struggling as a team.

In the weeks prior to their "engagement," the two had several public arguments and were losing to mid-card opponents. Some weeks they were left off *Smackdown* entirely and relegated to duty on *Velocity*, a secondary show. The boost they received from this gimmick pretty much forces them to stay together for the time being, especially after the attack by Rosie and Jamal.

Considering the WWE tag title is exclusive to *Raw*, there's not much of a point in Billy and Chuck remaining a tag team. Even though they were never married, they're partners for the next few months, whether they like it or not.

This whole situation could be particularly damaging to Billy, a former Intercontinental champion who once had ambitions of following his old DeGeneration X part-





Because of his struggles in the past, Billy (shown against Rey Mysterio Jr., left) will probably have a harder time making a major impact in the singles division than Chuck (shown against Matt Hardy, above). Then again, it might be impossible for either of them to shed the gay gimmick.

ner Triple-H into the WWE World title picture.

With all the attention this storyline has attracted, it will be next to impossible for Billy to reinvent himself the way Hunter slowly and brilliantly did.

The team of Scotty "Too Hotty" Taylor and Brian Christopher very nearly found themselves in the same position Chuck and Billy are now in. Before they were the hip-hopping Too Cool, Taylor and Christopher were the effeminate Too Much. Like Chuck and Billy, Too Much played up the gay stereotype to get heat from the fans. In 1997, there were rumors that the two would get married on *Raw*. Though they became one of WWE's most popular teams for a while, their success proved to be fleeting, and neither man has really been able to break away from a comedy role ever since.

Is that the same fate awaiting Billy and Chuck?

"The fact of the matter is Chuck and Billy were a huge part of one of WWE's most talked-about shows of the year," said veteran manager and promoter Jim Cornette. "It's too early to go and speculate about what this means for the rest of their careers. I think this can open a lot of doors for

Let's remember that both Chuck and Billy weren't locks to even get time on *Smackdown* before the wedding angle played out. We might find that six months from now, the whole ridiculous (but wildly entertaining) storyline paid no long-term dividends for WWE.

them over the next few months. Both those guys have an awful lot of talent and they're both good talkers. I'm not ready to write them off. For Pete's sake, they were interviewed by Matt Lauer on the *Today Show* the other day!"

There's no denying Chuck and Billy will receive short-term benefits from the wedding angle. But in the end, it comes down to one thing: What's more important to Gunn and Palumbo, title glory ... or three minutes on the *Today Show* and a new gravy boat from Pottery Barn? □



Photo by Joe Zanolle



## editors' roundtable

### Should WWE Sever Ties Between Raw And Smackdown?

**"Vince McMahon needs competition to thrive, and right now there really isn't any. Completely separating Raw and Smackdown isn't something that he can or can't do—it's something that he might have to do in order to ensure his company's bright future."**

**—Matt Brock**

**O**N AUGUST 26, **Smackdown** General Manager Stephanie McMahon announced that Brock Lesnar, who only one night earlier had defeated The Rock to become the youngest World heavyweight champion in WWE's history, was taking himself and the undisputed WWE championship exclusively to **Smackdown**. **Raw** wrestlers would be able to look at the belt on TV and at pay-per-views, they'd be able to talk about how cool it would be to win the championship, but they wouldn't be able to wrestle for it.

One week later, **Raw** GM Eric

Bischoff announced that he was unearthing the old WCW World heavyweight title belt (which WWE renamed the World title after the failed WCW invasion storyline) and awarded it to Triple-H because, well, he's Triple-H and he's that damn good. As soon as Triple-H accepted the title and began bragging about being the right man for the gold, the undisputed WWE title became a memory.

Triple-H was the **Raw** champion, Brock Lesnar was the **Smackdown** champion, and neither side recognized the other's champion.

Though WWE didn't make mention of any more brand-separating gambits, the decision to go with a **Raw** champion and a **Smackdown** champion had industry insiders talking of a complete brand separation. **Raw** and **Smackdown** already had different talent rosters and touring schedules. Now that there are two WWE champions, one for each of the brands, what is keeping WWE from separating **Raw** and **Smackdown** once and for all?

That's the question that we're here to answer, because the answer isn't as easy as it might seem. In this "Editors' Roundtable," Publisher Stu Saks, Editor-in-Chief Dave Lenker, Senior Writer Will Welsh, and Contributing Writer Matt Brock take a look at where WWE goes from here, including whether or not it's time to take the brand extension to the extreme.

**STU SAKS:** Will and Dave, thanks for attending. Matt, I know that you're not used to coming to meetings like this and that you consider yourself more of a lone gunman, so I really appreciate you taking the time to join us at this little shindig.

**MATT BROCK:** Can it, Saks. The Mets play the Phillies tonight. I plan on enjoying the game with my good buddy Jim Beam, so if you don't mind, I'd



Once Triple-H was handed the old WCW World title belt and declared champion of **Raw**, it became obvious that WWE was moving closer to making **Raw** and **Smackdown** totally separate brands. There is at least one more major step that would have to be taken, however.



like to get on with this already.

**SAKS:** Glad to see that you came prepared, Matt. Dave, can you give Matt a quick synopsis?

**DAVE LENKER:** Sure thing. Matt, as you know, WWE now has two champions. Triple-H is the *Raw* champion, while Brock Lesnar is the *Smackdown* champion, even if that isn't what they're officially called. With two separate rosters, two separate TV shows, and now two separate champions, we want to discuss whether it's time for WWE to completely sever all ties between *Raw* and *Smackdown* and let them go their separate ways from here on.

**BROCK:** By "sever all ties" you mean whether or not *Raw* and *Smackdown* should each run their own pay-per-views?

**LENKER:** Well, that does seem to be the last remaining vestige of a unified WWE.

**BROCK:** Hah! Go figure.

**LENKER:** Matt, do you care to expound on that comment?

**BROCK:** Let me tell you a little something. I've been covering wrestling longer than you've been alive. Up until a couple of years ago, there wasn't one time—not one—when North America was dominated by one wrestling company the way that the WWF ...

**WILL WELSH:** That's WWE now.

**BROCK:** Whatever you want to call it, kid. I'm thinking here. You're probably even younger than Lenker. You probably consider "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin one of the sport's pioneers. Anyway, this WWE monopoly, it's still something that's completely new to the sport. And don't give me that NWA-TNA stuff, either. No pay-per-view-only company is going to be a real force in this sport. They have their little niche, but they're not a major player. But back to the point I

was trying to make. Wrestling is experiencing its first monopoly, and what I've seen of the WWE monopoly so far doesn't give me any great hope. Vince McMahon needs competition to thrive, and right now there really isn't any. Completely separating *Raw* and *Smackdown* isn't something that he can or can't do—it's something that he might have to do in order to ensure his company's bright future.

**SAKS:** Will, we finally got a straight answer out of Matt. What are your thoughts?

**WELSH:** It's six in one hand, half a dozen in the other.

**BROCK:** Kid's a little wishy-washy, huh?

**WELSH:** It's like this. Now that there's a *Raw* champion and a *Smackdown* champion, it makes sense for WWE to sever all ties between the two. Right now, there's a monthly pay-per-view that both rosters attend, and from what my sources tell me, most of the wrestlers treat it like it's one huge family reunion. There are good feelings, hugs, and handshakes all around. If WWE stopped promoting combined *Raw* and *Smackdown* pay-per-views, maybe some honest-to-goodness animosity would develop. In my opinion, that's what drove the Monday night wars, and that kind of competitiveness has been

lacking from WWE of late.

**SAKS:** Dave, are you of the same opinion?

**LENKER:** So far, yes. The sides are too friendly. That much is obvious. Except for Bischoff and Steph, I don't see how anyone is concerned with showing the other roster up—and that's a drastic change compared to the Monday night wars. Back in 1997, '98, I don't think that you could've put 20 WCW and 20 WWE guys in a room together. A fight would have broken out almost immediately. Since one show is on cable and the other on broadcast TV and they're on different nights, the only way to truly foster



Was there ever much doubt that The Undertaker would beat Test at SummerSlam? UT is one of *Raw*'s top stars, and he and other top stars are likely to continue getting pushed as long as *Raw* and *Smackdown* share each pay-per-view. It's the safe thing for the creative teams to do.





There's no denying that *Raw*'s Steven Richards (above) and *Smackdown*'s Chavo Guerrero Jr. (below) have a lot of talent. Both get time on their brands' weekly shows. Yet as of press time, neither had ever wrestled on a WWE pay-per-view. If ties between the brands were severed, they would get finally get chances to see just how good and valuable they could be.



some serious animosity is through a dual pay-per-view system where both brands are competing for the fans' almighty dollar.

**SAKS:** Matt, you have to have something on your mind. Hit us with it.

**BROCK:** They didn't have pay-per-view back then, but (Lou) Thesz didn't wrestle on the same shows as (Bruno) Sammartino or (Verne) Gagne very of-

ten. Superstar Graham didn't wrestle on the same shows as Harley Race or Nick Bockwinkel every night. And even if they did have pay-per-view back then, it wouldn't have changed matters. The promoters knew that the money was in the dream of the unification match, not the unification match itself.

**WELSH:** And there's even more to the pay-per-view issue. I compare

WWE's current situation to that of the NBA and NFL all-star games, where players from both sides of the leagues compete against each other in what we're supposed to believe are hotly contested matchups. In reality, that's a bunch of bull. Anyone whose ever seen an NBA or NFL all-star game can tell you that those games are all offense and no defense—and nobody really cares who wins.

**BROCK:** You have to be kidding me. What's this kid's point?

**SAKS:** Ignore him, Will. Continue.

**WELSH:** As I was saying, there's all offense and no defense in those games. Right now, the same thing is taking place on WWE pay-per-views. *Raw* and *Smackdown* are throwing out their best possible matches in hopes of winning over new viewers who might only watch the other program. They're not holding anything in reserve. By completely severing ties with each other, *Raw* and *Smackdown* would slow down the pace of storylines, and more wrestlers would get meaningful time on pay-per-view. Take, for instance, Steven Richards. He's been all over *Raw* lately. But I can guarantee that he won't see a pay-per-view

match anytime soon, because *Raw* has to put its best foot forward—and Richards can be a damn ugly toe at times. And by that I don't mean he's a lousy wrestler. I just mean he's perceived as a guy who belongs at the bottom of a card and isn't a threat to any of the big stars. If *Raw* had its own pay-per-view system, Richards would be able to showcase his talents on



**"Except for Bischoff and Steph, I don't see how anyone is concerned with showing the other roster up—and that's a drastic change compared to the Monday night wars ... The only way to truly foster some serious animosity is through a dual pay-per-view system where both brands are competing for the fans' almighty dollar."**

**—Dave Lenker**

pay-per-view, and that would help his career because the fans would take him more seriously. The creative team would have to work harder to build new stars. And that would help *Raw*.

**SAKS:** Dave, both you and Will said that you saw a possible downside. Will's been talking a lot, so why don't you give us your downside to a complete brand separation.

**LENKER:** Will and I have talked about this, and we share a lot of the same thoughts. Any way you look at it, WWE's pay-per-view buy rates, TV ratings, and live attendance numbers have been dropping. The only reason WWE made more money touring in its last quarter than it did one year previous in the same quarter is because the company started running about three *Raw* house shows and three *Smackdown* house shows per week—including some very profitable overseas shows. If WWE hadn't done that, the drop off in fan attendance would've deeply hurt the company's bottom line. Now, if *Raw* and *Smackdown* go their separate ways, WWE is saying that fan attendance won't drop off any more, because if it does, WWE could face dire financial consequences. With double the number of arena fees and associated costs that go along with a dual touring system,

WWE had better be pretty darn sure that the attendance downward spiral is over—and I'm certainly not convinced that we're through this latest recession yet. That's why I would be kind of tempted to let *Raw* and *Smackdown* get weekly rubs off each other and let them share the same pay-per-view space. That way, at least all the top stars could shine. You wouldn't have to put a newcomer or an undercard guy like Steven Richards on pay-per-view and burden him with high hopes, and the pay-per-views would be filled with the sport's top stars, making their \$35 price tag easier to sell to the fans.

**SAKS:** Dave, you almost sound like you're against a complete split.

**LENKER:** I'm really not, though. I'd still sever all ties between the

brands. The upside is too huge to pass up. If it doesn't work, WWE can always scale back, but maybe WWE ought to wait a little while longer before going the whole way.

**SAKS:** Pretty much your thoughts, Will?

**WELSH:** Dave nailed it.

**SAKS:** Good. Now, Matt, you've actually been kind of quiet. Do you have any last thoughts?

**BROCK:** Yeah. While we're on the subject of *Raw* and *Smackdown* champions, do we want to go over the world title situation? I say that we scrap the whole concept.

**SAKS:** I'm not close to being ready for that discussion! Perhaps that's an issue we can tackle at our next roundtable meeting. For now, however, meeting adjourned. □



It was nice to see the fresh matchup of Kurt Angle vs. Rey Mysterio Jr. at SummerSlam. They delivered a terrific match. If there were *Raw* and *Smackdown* PPVs, we'd see additional fresh matches, as both brands would be forced to make better use of their entire rosters.



## data sheet

### DOUG WILLIAMS

HEIGHT: 6'

WEIGHT: 230

HOMETOWN: Maidstone, England

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: Winning the British championship earlier this year

HE DOES IT SO WELL: Shootfighting. "The Anarchist"

is well-versed in mat wrestling as well as judo, sambo, and puroresu.

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: Versatility. He is a master of

intense, formal wrestling styles, but he needs to learn how to rein in that intensity when dealing with, for lack of a better term, a typical American opponent. While he matches up well with Low-Ki because he wrestles a similar high-intensity style, he might be befuddled by someone like Jerry Lawler. Since he is wrestling in the U.S. a lot now, this is a concern.

PET FINISHER: German suplex

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: The four-way match against Low-Ki, Christopher Daniels, and Spanky to crown the inaugural Ring of Honor champion on July 27, 2002. Williams didn't win, but by just surviving the 100-plus-degree heat in the building for the 60-minute "Ironman" match, he proved his worth.

OUTLOOK FOR 2003: Thanks to his success in Ring of Honor, a promotion that has received a lot of publicity in recent months, he might finally gain prominence in the U.S. If he excels in Ring of Honor, one of the country's toughest indies, he should be able to do well elsewhere.

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS:

"Doug Williams is definitely a threat to American indie wrestlers. He's one of the toughest wrestlers out there, and he knows how to stretch you in the ring. He won't hesitate to do it, either. I always prepare for a match with him differently than I would anyone else."

—American Dragon





## EDDIE GUERRERO

HEIGHT: 5'8"

WEIGHT: 223

HOMETOWN: El Paso, TX

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE:

Let's go back to 1995 at the ECW Arena. Guerrero and Dean Malenko were about to join WCW, but agreed to wrestle one last match against each other in ECW. It was their best. The crowd reaction to the 30-minute classic was unbelievable and basically let us know that both of them were finally on their way to stardom in the U.S.

HE DOES IT SO WELL: A veteran of competition in the U.S., Japan, and Mexico, he can wrestle almost any style masterfully, and he has excellent counterwrestling skills.

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE:

He's too cocky and often too anxious to try to infuriate his opponents. He gives them too much incentive to beat him.

PET FINISHER: Frog splash

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: He's probably faced more challenges in his career than he can remember, but undoubtedly the toughest came when he was fired by WWE after being arrested for DUI last fall. It happened shortly after he got out of rehab, so he gave the company little choice. Instead of wallowing in self-pity, he started putting his life back together immediately, remained active in the indies and Japan, and earned another chance in WWE.

OUTLOOK FOR 2003: WWE apparently doesn't see him as a future main-eventer, but that doesn't mean he won't remain a valuable player. He connects with crowds the way few heels do these days, but we wouldn't be surprised to see him get a chance as a fan favorite next year.

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS:

"Guerrero's the kind of opponent who brings out the best in you in the ring. You can't assume you know what he's going to do next, because if you do, he'll make you look bad. He makes you think and adjust on the fly. It's a real challenge." —Edge





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## the insider

(Continued from page 20)

say? Flannel and camouflage never looked so good before.

I like long walks in the park with Low-Ki, skipping rocks across the pond as the little ducks swim in formation across the water. Just kidding.

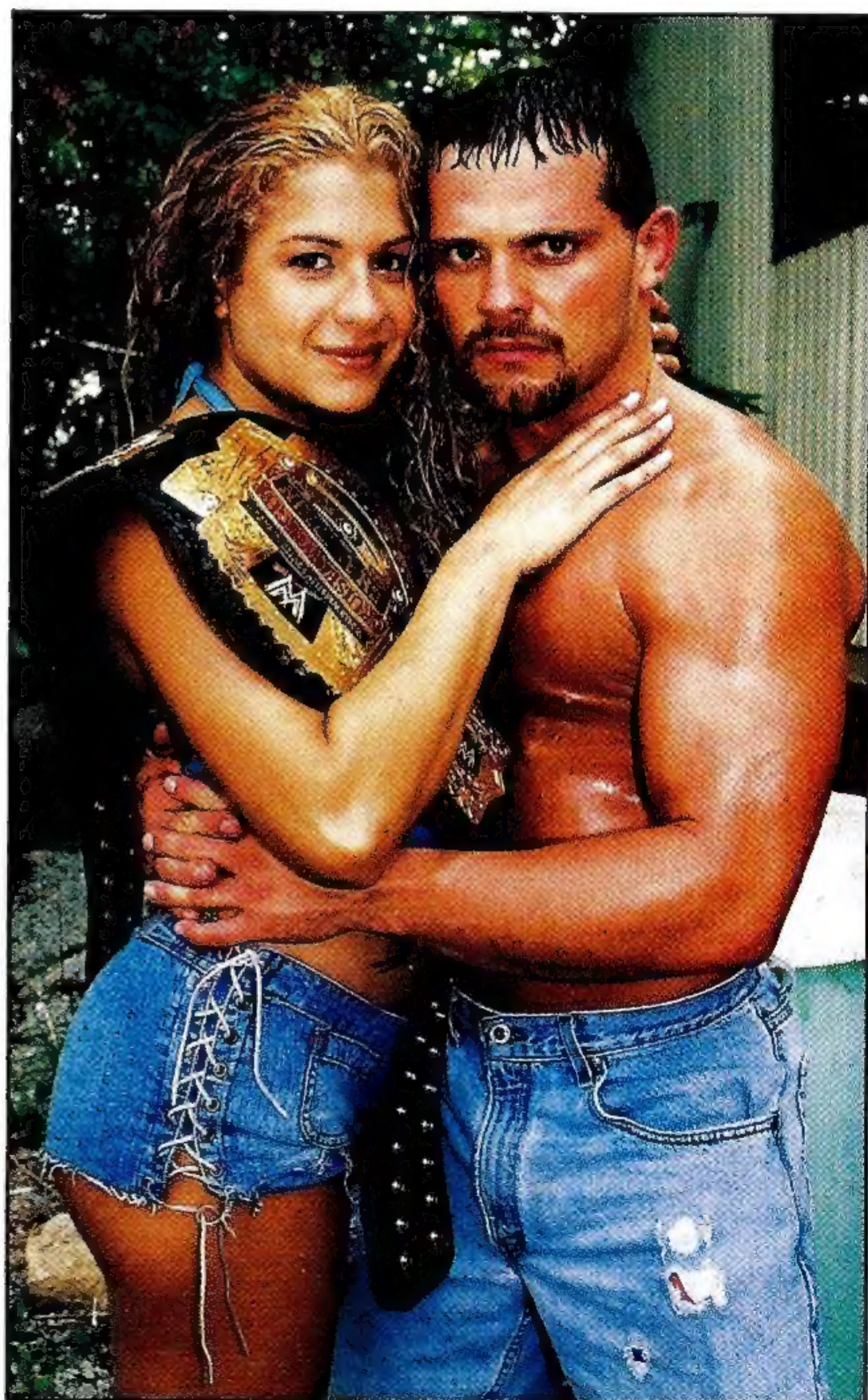
I really like Victoria. She has a great look and an even better repertoire in the ring. If given the chance, Victoria could very well be a bigger hit than Chyna or Sable ever dreamed of being. As the token female of The Revolution in Ohio Valley Wrestling, she didn't just stand back and cower like a valet. Instead, Victoria got in there and fought for her men, often wrestling alongside them in matches. In WWE, she definitely has the right combination of skills, looks, attitude, and personality to have fans screaming her name for years to come. She's the only other person in wrestling with which I am willing to share my "Queen" nickname. Of course, I had it first, but I'll share it with her. She deserves it.

I do not despise independent wrestling. Really, I don't. In fact, I go to more indy shows per year than WWE shows. At home, I sit and watch tapes. At work, I scour the Internet for new promotions that I've never heard of before for inclusion in the *Wrestle America Annual* "Guide To Pro Wrestling" (available on newsstands everywhere right now). I am constantly in search of new talent to profile within the pages of our magazines. There is talent out there—it's

just getting harder to find. It really is disheartening to think that any skinny little teenager with a pair of cutoff jean shorts and a ratty-looking girlfriend can be an indy wrestler. No one even owns a pair of boots or trunks anymore. But, every once in a while, someone comes along to make up for all of the wannabe trash out there.

I do like the Internet. I visit the same sites that you all do (well, those of you who actually have electricity wired into your trailers, as well as a computer). I read all the stuff that's written. What I've learned, though, is that it's just like listening to the town gossip: Just because it's said doesn't mean it's true.

See, I'm not so bad now, am I? ☐



Look! Jamie Noble and Nidia are posing in front of your house! Oh, wait. That's their trailer. I should have known. There's more trash in your front yard.





Basham wrestled a terrific match against Benoit before eventually succumbing to his German suplex in the main event of the card. Liz Hunter wasn't thrilled to find out OVW would be using the name of one of the old WCW's big pay-per-view names for one of its shows, but her opinion had changed by the time the card ended.

mitting to the crossface later that night.

During my long flight to Louisville, I had thought about how Lesnar vs. Basham seemed like a terrible mismatch. How could anyone take it seriously? Then I thought of how Lesnar and Basham were considered equal stars not too long ago. Basham

olution at the beginning of the show. Damaja said Lesnar's withdrawal was due to fear, not an injury. Basham, citing their days in Ohio Valley together, said Lesnar feared him because they knew each other so well. "The Machine" also said WWE didn't want him suddenly walking onto the set of *Smackdown* as the new champ.

Lesnar emerged from the backstage area to the horror of that Revolution gang, which includes Basham, Damaja, Victoria, and new member Jackie Gayda. Lesnar declared that he was "no damn coward." He dismissed the Kentucky State Athletic Commission's ruling that didn't allow him to compete and said, "That ain't stoppin' me from coming over there and beating your scrawny ass!" Fortunately, Cornette quickly introduced Benoit as Basham's new opponent.

Benoit reminded the fans that he had appeared at an OVW event last spring while recovering from spinal surgery, and Basham had tried taunting him into a match. "The Canadian Crippler" said he couldn't wait to force "the best damn technical wrestler Danny Davis ever trained" into sub-

was a long-time OVW champ. The best Lesnar could do was the Southern tag team title with Shelton Benjamin. In Louisville, Benoit vs. Basham might seem more of a mismatch than Lesnar vs. Basham.

As I said, things happen in Kentucky that just don't happen anywhere else. That was evident from the very start of this show.

Christopher Nowinski, who has compiled an impressive win-loss Raw record and humiliated Bradshaw on a couple of occasions, lost to R.C. Haas by submission in the opening match. Damaja beat *Smackdown* standout Randy Orton. Amazingly, the fans cheered Rico as he defeated Lance Cade. Mark Henry was cheered along with partner Matt Morgan as they beat Travis Bane and Seven. I suppose no one, not even someone in Kentucky, can boo a big ol' teddy bear like Mark Henry.

There was an interesting battle between former WCW World tag team champions in which Mark Jindrak defeated Sean O'Haire. Next, Southern tag champs Shelton Ben-

jamin and Redd Dogg beat Rob Conway and Nick Dinsmore.

Then it was back into the Kentucky vortex as John "Prototype" Cena, who had pinned Chris Jericho on pay-per-view this past summer and asserted himself as *Smackdown*'s new wonder boy, lost to Ohio Valley heavyweight champion Nova—thanks to an unwanted assist from Cena's scorned manager, Kenny Bolin.

Regarding the main event, I won't hold you in suspense any longer. Brock Lesnar distracted Doug Basham, who fell victim to Chris Benoit's German suplex and a three-count. Since when does Chris Benoit need Brock Lesnar's help to beat Doug Basham? Only in Kentucky.

Before "Fall Brawl," I thought WWE was using OVW to dish out another insult to WCW's legacy. Afterward, I realized Louisville might be a nice place for Starrcade.

(Liz Hunter can be reached via e-mail at [SuperstarLizH@yahoo.com](mailto:SuperstarLizH@yahoo.com).)

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# official ratings

## TOP 15

### 1—BROCK LESNAR

(4) WWE Smackdown champion

### 2—THE UNDERTAKER

(6) No. 1 contender: WWE Smackdown title

### 3—TRIPLE-H

(-) WWE Raw champion

### 4—GENICHIRO TENRYU

(5) All-Japan Triple Crown champion

### 5—ROB VAN DAM

(1) No. 1 contender: WWE Raw title

### 6—RON KILLINGS

(-) NWA heavyweight champion

### 7—MITSU HARU MISAWA

(-) GHC heavyweight champion

### 8—CHRIS JERICHO

(-) WWE Intercontinental champion

### 9—JERRY LYNN

(-) NWA-TNA X champion

### 10—CHRIS BENOIT

(-) No. 2 contender: WWE Smackdown title

### 11—KURT ANGLE

(7) No. 3 contender: WWE Smackdown title

### 12—YUJI NAGATA

(3) IWGP heavyweight champion

### 13—YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA

(-) No. 1 contender: GHC heavyweight title

### 14—NOVA

(12) OVW heavyweight champion

### 15—EDDIE GUERRERO

(-) No. 4 contender: WWE Smackdown title

## WWE

### 1—BROCK LESNAR

(3) 295, Minneapolis, MN

### 2—THE UNDERTAKER

(4) 304, Dallas, TX

### 3—TRIPLE-H

(-) 269, Greenwich, CT

### 4—ROB VAN DAM

(2) 237, Battle Creek, MI

### 5—CHRIS JERICHO

(8) 225, Winnipeg, Manitoba

### 6—CHRIS BENOIT

(13) 224, Edmonton, Alberta

### 7—KURT ANGLE

(5) 233, Pittsburgh, PA

### 8—EDDIE GUERRERO

(11) 223, El Paso, TX

### 9—BOOKER T

(7) 250, Houston, TX

### 10—EDGE

(6) 240, Toronto, Ontario

### 11—JAMIE NOBLE

(9) 190, Hanover, WV

### 12—REY MISTERIO JR.

(-) 163, San Diego, CA

### 13—KANE

(-) 304, parts unknown

### 14—RIC FLAIR

(-) 243, Charlotte, NC

### 15—BUH BUH RAY DUDLEY

(-) 325, Massapequa, NY

## OVW

### 1—NOVA

(1) 214, Bricktown, NJ

### 2—DOUG BASHAM

(3) 241, Louisville, KY

### 3—DAMAJA

(4) 240, Seymour, IN

### 4—R.C. HAAS

(14) 265, Edmond, OK

### 5—FLASH

(6) 225, Detroit, MI

### 6—ROB CONWAY

(7) 240, Pittsburgh, PA

### 7—TRAVIS BANE

(-) 285, Tombstone, AZ

### 8—SEAN O'HAIRE

(11) 270, Hilton Head, SC

### 9—REDD DOGG

(9) 240, Lafayette, LA

### 10—SHELTON BENJAMIN

(8) 245, Minneapolis, MN

### 11—MARK JINDRAK

(-) 253, Auburn, NY

### 12—CHRISTOPHER NOWINSKI

(-) 236, Cambridge, MA

### 13—SEVEN

(2) 278, Memphis, TN

### 14—MATT MORGAN

(-) 330, Fairfield, CT

### 15—LANCE CADE

(13) 253, San Antonio, TX

## JAPAN

### 1—GENICHIRO TENRYU

(2) 235, Tokyo, Japan

### 2—MITSU HARU MISAWA

(-) 228, Ashikaga, Japan

### 3—YUJI NAGATA

(1) 228, Tokyo, Japan

### 4—YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA

(-) 270, Sapporo, Japan

### 5—KEIJI MUTO

(3) 245, Yamanashi, Japan

### 6—MASA CHONO

(14) 235, Tokyo, Japan

### 7—JUN AKIYAMA

(9) 225, Hiroshima, Japan

### 8—KOJI KANEMOTO

(5) 205, Osaka, Japan

### 9—YOSHINARI OGAWA

(4) 202, Fichigi, Japan

### 10—KENDO KA SHIN

(7) 195, Tokyo, Japan

### 11—JUSHIN LIGER

(-) 222, Hiroshima, Japan

### 12—TADAO YASUDA

(11) 310, Tokyo, Japan

### 13—HIROYOSHI TENZAN

(-) 270, Tokyo, Japan

### 14—KAZUYUKI FUJITA

(-) 253, Funabashi, Japan

### 15—TAIYO KEA

(6) 235, Honolulu, HI

## MEXICO

### 1—HECTOR GARZA

(1) 220, Monterrey, Mexico

### 2—UNIVERSO DOS MIL

(2) 240, Mexico City, Mexico

### 3—BLACK TIGER

(3) 193, Mexico City, Mexico

### 4—EL HIJO DEL SANTO

(4) 180, Tlalancingo, Mexico

### 5—TARZAN BOY

(14) 218, Mexico City, Mexico

### 6—LATIN LOVER

(5) 190, Monterrey, Mexico

### 7—DR. WAGNER JR.

(6) 215, Mexico City, Mexico

### 8—BLACK WARRIOR

(-) 221, Mexico City, Mexico

### 9—LA PARKA

(7) 235, Torreon, Mexico

### 10—FELINO

(-) 165, Mexico City, Mexico

### 11—REY MISTERIO SR.

(-) 183, Mexico City, Mexico

### 12—OCTAGON

(-) 180, Monterrey, Mexico

### 13—PERRO AGUAYO JR.

(10) 165, Zacatecas, Mexico

### 14—MR. NIEBLA

(9) 185, Cuernavaca, Mexico

### 15—NEGRO CASAS

(-) 175, Mexico City, Mexico

## TOP 15 TAG TEAMS

### 1—MASA CHONO & HIROYOSHI TENZAN

(4) IWGP International tag team champions

### 2—CHRISTIAN & LANCE STORM

(1) No. 2 team: WWE Raw

### 3—THE HURRICANE & KANE

(-) WWE World tag team champions

### 4—BOOKER T & GOLDUST

(12) No. 3 team: WWE Raw

### 5—CHRIS HARRIS & JAMES STORM

(-) NWA tag team champions

### 6—JAMAL & ROSIE

(-) No. 4 team: WWE Raw

### 7—BILLY GUNN & CHUCK PALUMBO

(5) No. 1 team: WWE Smackdown

### 8—BRIAN ADAMS & BRYAN CLARK

(9) All-Japan International tag team champions

### 9—EDDIE & CHAVO GUERRERO JR.

(-) No. 2 team: WWE Smackdown

### 10—TAKESHI MORISHIMA & TAKESHI RIKIOH

(2) GHC tag team champions

### 11—SHELTON BENJAMIN & REDD DOGG

(8) OVW Southern tag team champions

### 12—RON HARRIS & BRIAN LEE

(-) No. 1 contenders: NWA tag title

### 13—BUH BUH RAY & SPIKE DUDLEY

(7) No. 5 team: WWE Raw

### 14—ROB CONWAY & NICK DINSMORE

(-) No. 1 contenders: OVW Southern tag title

### 15—BROTHER CLAY & MATT DILLINGER

(-) HWA tag team champions



These ratings are compiled by the editors with the assistance of promoters, wrestlers, and reporters around the country, and are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and the inherent skill of each wrestler. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue ... Championships highlighted in bold on the "Roll Call Of Champions" have changed hands since our previous issue ... The information under the championship listing indicates the date that champion won the title, who the former champion was, and where the match took place.

**For period ended September 24, 2002**

## ROLL CALL OF CHAMPIONS

**ALL-JAPAN INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: BRIAN ADAMS & BRYAN CLARK**  
(July 17, 2002; from Taiyo Kea & Keiji Muto; Osaka, Japan)

**ALL-JAPAN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KENDO KA SHIN**  
(April 13, 2002; beat Masanobu Fuchi; Tokyo, Japan)

**ALL-JAPAN TRIPLE CROWN CHAMPION: GENICHIRO TENRYU**  
(April 13, 2002; beat Keiji Muto; Tokyo, Japan)

**BORDER CITY WRESTLING CAN-AM HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: JOHNNY SWINGER**  
(November 27, 2001; won eight-man gauntlet match; Oldcastle, Ontario)

**BORDER CITY WRESTLING TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: CYRUS & TERRY TAYLOR**  
(October 10, 2001; from Tyson Dux & Jack Damage; Oldcastle, Ontario)

**EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: RED**  
(September 14, 2002; from Prince Nana; Wilmington, DE)

**EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION MID-ATLANTIC CHAMPION: JAPANESE POOL BOY**  
(September 14, 2002; from Mr. Ooh La La; Wilmington, DE)

**EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: JOEL & JOSE MAXIMO**  
(May 4, 2002; won four-way match; Wilmington, DE)

**HEARTLAND WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: MATT STRYKER**  
(September 17, 2002; from Cody Hawk; Cincinnati, OH)

**HEARTLAND WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: BROTHER CLAY & MATT DILLINGER**  
(September 3, 2002; from Nigel McGuinness & Human Time Bomb; Cincinnati, OH)

**IPW Hardcore WRESTLING HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: AGENT STEELE**  
(June 8, 2002; from Mike Sullivan; St. Petersburg, FL)

**IPW Hardcore WRESTLING TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: SCOOT ANDREWS & MIKE SULLIVAN**  
(September 20, 2002; from The Strong Brothers; St. Petersburg, FL)

**IWF AMERICAN CHAMPION: HADRIAN**  
(February 23, 2002; won vacant title in four-way match; West Paterson, NJ)

**IWF HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: BIGGIE BIGGS**  
(June 15, 2002; from Roman; West Paterson, NJ)

**IWF TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: SHAWN DONOVON & TRAVIS BLAKE**  
(June 14, 2002; from Pierce St. John & BPA Barry; West Paterson, NJ)

**IWGP HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: YUJI NAGATA**  
(April 5, 2002; from Tadao Yasuda; Tokyo, Japan)

**IWGP INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: MASA CHONO & HIROYOSHI TENZAN**  
(March 24, 2002; beat Yuji Nagata & Manabu Nakanishi in tournament final; Amagasaki, Japan)

**IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KOJI KANEMOTO**  
(July 20, 2002; from Minoru Tanaka; Sapporo, Japan)

**MARYLAND CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING CRUISERWEIGHT CHAMPION: RED**  
(March 27, 2002; from Qenaan Creed; Glen Burnie, MD)

**MARYLAND CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: THE BRUISER**  
(February 16, 2002; from Orlando Jordan; Harrington, DE)

**MARYLAND CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: CHAD BOWMAN & DINO DIVINE**  
(May 22, 2002; from Joey Matthews & Christian York; Glen Burnie, MD)

**NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: RON KILLINGS**  
(August 7, 2002; from Ken Shamrock; Nashville, TN)

**NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: CHRIS HARRIS & JAMES STORM**  
(September 18, 2002; beat Ron Harris & Brian Lee; Nashville, TN)

**NWA SOUTHWEST TEXAS HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: J.P. BLACK**  
(March 22, 2002; beat Chaz Taylor for vacant title; North Richland Hills, TX)

**NWA SOUTHWEST TEXAS TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: JUSTIN 2 FINE & B.J. TURNER**  
(June 21, 2002; from Larry Green & Chris Young; North Richland Hills, TX)

**NWA-TNA X CHAMPION: JERRY LYNN**  
(August 21, 2002; from Low-Ki; Nashville, TN)

**OHIO VALLEY WRESTLING HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: NOVA**  
(May 15, 2002; from Prototype; Jeffersonville, IN)

**OHIO VALLEY WRESTLING SOUTHERN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: SHELTON BENJAMIN & REDD DOGG**  
(July 17, 2002; from Flash & Trash; Jeffersonville, IN)

**PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN CHAMPION: MITSU HARU MISAWA**  
(September 23, 2002; from Yoshihiro Takayama; Tokyo, Japan)

**PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: YOSHINOBU KANEMURA**  
(May 26, 2002; beat KENTA in tournament final; Sapporo, Japan)

**PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TAKESHI MORISHIMA & TAKESHI RIKIOH**  
(February 17, 2002; from Takao Omori & Yoshihiro Takayama; Tokyo, Japan)

**RING OF HONOR CHAMPION: XAVIER**  
(September 21, 2002; from Low-Ki; Philadelphia, PA)

**RING OF HONOR TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: CHRISTOPHER DANIELS & DONOVAN MORGAN**  
(September 21, 2002; beat American Dragon & Michael Modest in tournament final; Philadelphia, PA)

**WWE CRUISERWEIGHT CHAMPION: JAMIE NOBLE**  
(June 23, 2002; from The Hurricane; Columbus, OH)

**WWE INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION: CHRIS JERICHO**  
(September 16, 2002; from Rob Van Dam; Denver, CO)

**WWE RAW CHAMPION: TRIPLE-H**  
(September 2, 2002; awarded title by Eric Bischoff; Milwaukee, WI)

**WWE SMACKDOWN CHAMPION: BROCK LESNAR**  
(August 25, 2002; from The Rock; Uniondale, NY)

**WWE WOMEN'S CHAMPION: TRISH STRATUS**  
(September 22, 2002; from Molly Holly; Los Angeles, CA)

**WWE WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: THE HURRICANE & KANE**  
(September 23, 2002; from Christian & Lance Storm; Anaheim, CA)

**WORLD XTREME WRESTLING HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: SAMOAN STORM**  
(June 22, 2002; From Sugaa; Hazleton, PA)

**WORLD XTREME WRESTLING TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: MOLSONN & POPPA PETE**  
(July 12, 2002; From Da Hit Squad; Allentown, PA)